

Multi-stakeholder governance in the SDG era

*A case study of EAT's role within
global food systems governance*

Jenny Mork Rogdo



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Abstract

A central theme in global governance is the ongoing diffusion of power and authority from nation states to a myriad of non-governmental actors. While private and civil society actors have always influenced policy, they are now increasingly participating in governance alongside governments and shaping political processes. Governance forms that include stakeholders from a broad specter of society are often referred to as public-private, multi-actor, and multi-stakeholder governance. These initiatives are by many seen as promising responses to tackle the increasingly complex political relations of a globalized world. However, there are concerns that such political initiatives can be undemocratic, illegitimate, and subject to undue corporate influence. Researchers, civil society groups, and public officials thus call for more research to understand the influence of private and multi-stakeholder actors and their role in changing the world.

This case study of the EAT Foundation contributes original insight into these dynamics within the broader governance field of food. EAT is one of the multi-stakeholder newcomers which partners across business, science, and policy to catalyze a transformation in global food systems. As a platform for discussion across academic, social, and political disciplines, I found that EAT opened new epistemic terrain on how to address issues related to food more holistically. EAT thus contributed to the rise of attention to global food systems transformation and multi-stakeholder dialogues as promising approaches to overall sustainable development. EAT's approach was in 2021 conducted at unprecedented scale with the United Nations Food Systems Summit, a global multi-stakeholder event that has been criticized for reinforcing existing power asymmetries and further strengthening the control a handful of philanthropic foundations and corporations have over the food systems agenda. The case study thus sheds lights on the broader tendency of non-state actors as brokers of "multistakeholderism," a development that contributes to fundamentally restructure global political affairs.

Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Literature review	6
A changed landscape of global politics	6
Public-private and multi-stakeholder governance.....	12
Multistakeholderism in global governance of food	16
3. Theoretical and conceptual frameworks	24
Assessing influence and effectiveness	24
Analytical framework	29
Network and actor features	30
Policy environment	31
Issue characteristics	31
4. Methods	33
Data collection and data analysis.....	34
Document analysis	34
Key informant interviews	37
Positionality.....	39
Ethical considerations	40
5. The EAT Foundation	42
6. Factors explaining emergence and effectiveness	48
Network and actor features	48
Leadership	48
Governance	54
Composition of actors	59
Framing strategies.....	64
Issue characteristics	68
Severity.....	68
Affected groups.....	71
Tractability.....	72
Policy environment	73
Norms	74
Allies and opponents.....	76
Funding.....	79
7. Conclusion	83

How did EAT emerge as an influential actor?.....	83
EAT’s role within global food systems governance	86
Contributions and suggestions for further research	89
Bibliography	91
Appendix: Informants	113

1. Introduction

A central theme in global governance is the ongoing diffusion of power and authority from nation states, traditionally regarded the main legitimate actor on the world stage, to a myriad of non-governmental actors. Across fields, corporations, NGOs, philanthropic foundations, networks, and partnerships demonstrate considerable power to influence the agenda and shape political processes. Non-state actors have always influenced policy, but now they are increasingly taking over public tasks and participating in governance alongside governments.¹ Political initiatives that convene stakeholders from a broader specter of society are often described as public-private, multi-actor, and multi-stakeholder. Such entities are often promoted as promising responses to tackle the increasingly complex political relations of our globalized world. As we are witnessing the proliferation of private and public-private governance responses, we increasingly refer to “multistakeholderism” as an emerging governance form that is gradually replacing the multilateral state-centered system of the 20th century.²

This thesis contributes insights into these dynamics within the broader governance field of food, one of the policy domains in which United Nations agencies increasingly work in partnership with non-governmental organizations and civil society networks, private foundations, and corporations to define strategy and programs. Global food governance is currently in significant flux, as shown by the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit’s bold attempt to accelerate food systems change through multi-stakeholder governance at an unprecedented scale. The global summit, which convened tens of thousands of participants from around the world, was a series of physical and digital meetings held as multi-stakeholder dialogues to discuss food systems transformation. Researchers, public officials, and social movements have raised concerns about the summit, arguing that the multi-stakeholder governance we are witnessing is

¹ Held, “The diffusion of authority.”

² Gleckman, Multistakeholder Governance and Democracy.

undemocratic, illegitimate, and under heavy corporate influence.³ Claims have been made that the current developments are reconfiguring “the very foundations of authority and legitimacy in global governance.”⁴

The academic fields of international relations and global governance are increasingly paying attention to the multitude of private actors and their influence in policy and politics.⁵ Their role in global governance is profoundly altering power structures, paradigms, and the “rules of the game.”⁶ Although private actors like multi-stakeholder initiatives and philanthropic foundations have for long been recognized as central governance actors, there exists relatively few empirical studies of them thus far. Understanding whether, why and how such initiatives emerge and what influence they hold is crucial to understand their role in changing the world.

Specifically, this thesis presents a case study of the EAT Foundation. The aim is to understand its role within the broader governance field of food. EAT is a non-profit foundation established by two charitable foundations, the Stordalen Foundation and the Wellcome Trust, along with the Stockholm Resilience Centre of the University of Stockholm. EAT’s mission is to transform the global food system through “sound science, impatient disruption and novel partnerships.”⁷ In bringing together actors across policy, business, and science to discuss the interlinkages of food, health, and sustainability, EAT can be considered one of the multi-stakeholder newcomers in global governance. With the annual high-level conference EAT Stockholm Food Forum, EAT has since 2014 been a platform for interdisciplinary political and scientific debates around food systems transformation. EAT is also behind the EAT-*Lancet* Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems, a “landmark” in the academic field of sustainable diets.⁸ The highly cited report reviewed research from the academic fields of environmental sciences and nutrition to set quantitative scientific targets for healthy

³ Montenegro de Wit et al. “Editorial: Resetting Power in Global Food Governance”; CSIPM, “Letter to the United Nations Secretary-General,” Fakhri, “The Food System Summit’s Disconnection From People’s Real Needs.”

⁴ Canfield et al. “Reconfiguring Food Systems Governance,” 189.

⁵ Weiss and Wilkinson, “From international organization to global governance.”

⁶ Rushton and Williams, Partnerships and Foundations in Global Health, 20.

⁷ Eatforum.org 2019, “Our vision, mission and values”.

⁸ Ridgway et al. “Historical Developments and Paradigm Shifts in Public Health Nutrition Science, Guidance and Policy Actions,” 11.

diets and sustainable food production. Since it was published in 2019, the report has guided politicians and decision-makers to consider how health and sustainability can be integrated in food policy.⁹

Crucially, EAT has played a guiding role in developing the multi-stakeholder food systems approach dominating the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit agenda.¹⁰ The whole conceptual design originates from the Food Systems Dialogues project, an initiative EAT launched in 2018 together with its partners World Economic Forum (WEF), World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), Food and Land Use Coalition (FOLU), and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN).¹¹ The project was set up to stimulate a broader discussion on food systems transformation through hosting local, national, and regional multi-stakeholder dialogues around the world.¹² The 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit design, as a series of multi-stakeholder dialogues on food systems transformation, must be seen as directly inspired by the project developed by EAT and partners. There have been several reports on how these actors have advocated a global multi-stakeholder summit on food systems and participated in developing the Summit agenda.¹³ Both GAIN and EAT were also invited by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to take leading roles in facilitating central work streams at the Summit.

According to Arne Haugen, Managing Director at EAT, a UN summit on food systems would probably not have happened if it had not been for the preparatory work done by EAT.¹⁴ But despite its influence, no published social scientific studies have focused on EAT at the time of writing. This case study's objectives are thus to study what kind of initiative EAT is, how it came about, and what influence it holds. I do so by drawing on document analysis, key informant interviews, and academic literature, and analyzing my findings through an analytical framework developed by Shiffman and colleagues to

⁹ C40.org, "Good Food Cities Accelerator."

¹⁰ Arne Haugen, email message to author, April 11, 2023.

¹¹ Foodsystemsdialogues.org.

¹² Eatforum.org, "EAT Annual review 2018."

¹³ Fakhri, "Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Michael Fakhri"; ETC Group, "The Next Agribusiness Takeover"; Montenegro de Wit and Iles, "Woke Science and the 4th Industrial Revolution."

¹⁴ Interview with Arne Haugen, December 20, 2022.

discern factors that enable the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks.¹⁵ The analysis is guided by the following research question: *How did EAT emerge as an influential actor in global food systems governance?*

The analysis indicates that EAT entered the food systems debate as a particularly strong and diverse network of individuals and organizations that found effective ways of working together. EAT provided a compelling argument for food systems transformation and demonstrated the potential of multi-stakeholder dialogues as promising approaches to achieve overall sustainable development. In providing concrete solutions to an extremely severe and complex political issue, EAT successfully portrayed itself as an integral part of the solution it was designed to solve. More importantly though, EAT emerged in a highly fragmented and complex policy environment at a time when innovative ideas and norms around development were evolving. As a flexible, but powerful movement, EAT was the right actor at the right time to fill a vacuum in science and policy.

As a convener and platform for discussion across academic, social, and political disciplines, EAT opened new epistemic terrain on how to address issues related to food more holistically. In doing so, I argue that EAT contributed to the rise of attention to global food systems transformation and multi-stakeholder dialogues as promising approaches to overall sustainable development. EAT's approach was in 2021 carried out at an unprecedented scale with the United Nations Food Systems Summit. EAT is accordingly an example of a network, a private foundation, and/or an innovative multi-stakeholder initiative that directly and indirectly influences global policy and politics. This falls into a broader tendency of non-state actors as brokers of multistakeholderism, a development that contributes to fundamentally restructure the global governance architecture. In the food domain, this reinforces existing power asymmetries and further strengthens the control a handful of philanthropic foundations and corporations have over the food systems agenda.

The findings highlight the complexities behind global political relations and the importance of studying non-state actors as central components. Case studies like this

¹⁵ Shiffman et al. "A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks."

one provide insights into the ongoing scientific debates and power dynamics that are shaping global governance of food today. This is particularly relevant to political scientists within the fields of food, health, development, and sustainability. The thesis also speaks to the broader transdisciplinary academic debate on the emergence and effectiveness of various private and multi-stakeholder actors and their influence on policy and politics.

The thesis is structured in the following way. First, I provide a review of social scientific literature focusing on the influence of non-state actors and the rise of multistakeholderism in global governance in general and within the food and health domain in particular. Given EAT's origins, I highlight the role of private philanthropy in facilitating the emergence of various multi-stakeholder partnerships. In chapter 3, I review some relevant theoretical frameworks for the discussion and describe the analytical approach I have taken, applying Shiffman and colleagues' framework for analyzing network emergence and effectiveness in global health. In chapter 4, I describe my methods, explain the research process, and reflect on methodological limitations. Chapter 5 presents background to how and why EAT came about and what kind of initiative it is, while chapter 6 examines factors that may have enabled its emergence and effectiveness. Finally, I summarize my findings and draw out their implications for understanding the role of EAT in global food systems governance and research on multistakeholderism more broadly.

2. Literature review

The following literature review draws out some of the relevant academic discussions informing the thesis. I start by outlining some broader tendencies in global governance and take a closer look at the role of non-state actors in general and private foundations in particular. Then, I review some literature concerning the academic debate of public-private and multi-stakeholder governance. Finally, I describe the global governance field of food and reflect on how the described dynamics are particularly prominent within this specific domain.

A changed landscape of global politics

With globalization, the “widening, deepening, and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness,”¹⁶ global political relations are dramatically changing. The world economy has never been more integrated, and rapid developments in technology and means of communications create profound social and cultural changes. Events from the other side of the world are increasingly affecting people’s everyday lives. Complex environmental problems are transcending nation borders, and the traditional distinction between domestic and international affairs has become less meaningful than it used to be. These circumstances bring fundamental shifts to our governance structures. With increased complexity, states and government officials at all levels of governments face enormous challenges in finding effective ways to govern. As expressed by Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations:

...while the post-war multilateral system made it possible for the new globalization to emerge and flourish, globalization, in turn, has progressively rendered its designs antiquated. Simply put, our post-war institutions were built for an *inter-national* world, but we now live in a *global* world.¹⁷

¹⁶ McGrew, “Globalization and global politics,” 16.

¹⁷ Annan, “We the Peoples”: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century, 11.

The study of international political relations has for long largely focused on nation states as the main legitimate actor in global affairs.¹⁸ Today, we are increasingly studying more complex systems of “global governance”, understood as “the totality of the ways, formal and informal, the world is governed.”¹⁹ Many, or even most, patterns of political relations are not between states anymore, and one could even question whether the state remains the main actor on the world stage.²⁰ While predictions of the nation states’ demise might be exaggerated, the increasingly pluralistic nature of global politics certainly leaves states less powerful.²¹ The past decades have been characterized by an ongoing diffusion of power and authority from nation states and their multilateral organizations to a myriad of non-state actors.²² States are now embedded in worldwide webs of influential actors such as multilateral institutions, transnational corporations, civil society organizations, philanthropic foundations, associations, networks, and so on. To understand contemporary global political relations, we need to know more of the new actors and their roles in organizing, mobilizing and exercising political power.

Non-state actors have always attempted to influence international politics through lobbying national governments. Today, they are increasingly impacting international policy directly, at times even assuming governance tasks that earlier would have been seen as the responsibility of states.²³ Most notably is the increasingly powerful corporate sector. Transnational corporations account for nearly a third of world output, 80 per cent of international investment, and 70 per cent of world trade.²⁴ As key players in the global economy, multi- and transnational corporations often hold privileged positions in governance and policy arenas. Their material wealth makes them capable of directing significant resources to public relations activities and lobbying that can shape political outcomes.

Civil society actors, such as NGOs, social movements, business lobbies, and research institutes, are also increasingly taking part in global governance. The scale and intensity

¹⁸ Baylis et al. *The Globalization of World Politics*.

¹⁹ Weiss and Wilkinson, “From international organization to global governance,” 9.

²⁰ Baylis et al. *The Globalization of World Politics*.

²¹ McGrew, “Globalization and global politics,” 16.

²² Beck, *Power in the global age*.

²³ Held, “The diffusion of authority,” 67.

²⁴ McGrew, “Globalization and global politics,” 16.

of their participation is now in a different league.²⁵ More than 6000 NGOs are currently registered with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), allowing them to participate in UN meetings and share their perspectives in relevant cases.²⁶ Civil society organizations participate in global governance in both direct and indirect ways. In direct ways such as through policy consultations, and in indirect ways such as through third parties, they take part in shaping the political agenda, altering discourses, and driving institutional reforms.²⁷ Their participation also drives deeper structural changes to the political system:

by circumventing states to engage directly with global regulatory institutions civil society associations have promoted a shift in the overall mode of governance from statism (where societal rules emanate more or less entirely from the state) to polycentrism (where governance transpires through multi-actor networks).²⁸

Apart from NGOs and corporations, we also increasingly find looser entities such as global policy networks successfully impacting the political agenda. In global health research, Shiffman and colleagues have drawn attention to the significant role global health networks often play in impacting the agenda of world health politics. They define global health networks as “...cross-national webs of individuals and organizations linked by a shared concern to address a particular health problem global in scope”.²⁹ Health networks are more or less loosely organized entities exchanging information, providing resources, and engaging in a variety of activities to push a certain health issue further up on the global agenda. By for example generating, synthesizing and disseminating research on health topics, building coalitions, and securing global agreements, they attempt to alter the perception and support of addressing certain health issues. Shiffman et al. state that the proliferation of global health networks represents one of the most dramatic shifts we have seen in the field of global health governance over the past three decades, and that researchers should pay more attention to them.³⁰

²⁵ Scholte, “Civil society and NGOs,” 351.

²⁶ Ensango.org, “Consultative status.”

²⁷ Scholte, “Civil society and NGOs,” 358.

²⁸ Scholte, “Civil society and NGOs,” 360.

²⁹ Shiffman et al. “A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks,” i4.

³⁰ Shiffman et al. “A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks.”

Private foundations have also come to play major roles in global governance. Philanthropy in policy is not a new phenomenon. For instance, foundations have participated in establishing international organizations and developed some of the first international welfare programs.³¹ But today, they are increasingly shaping the global agenda by developing and structuring public policy.³² Although philanthropic foundations lack formal legitimacy and authority, they can command influence by virtue of their material wealth. However, their influence is not only financial, but have also come to shape norms and ideas around policy and governance. Keck and Sikkink have accordingly referred to them as “entrepreneurs of ideas.”³³ To exemplify, prior to the establishment of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1948, the Rockefeller Foundation was the only initiative working with health to truly operate internationally.³⁴ According to Birn, it contributed to shaping global public health more profoundly than any other organization of its time.³⁵ Perhaps most noticeable was the organization’s contribution to public health aspects such as research, professional training, implementation, and organization and institution building.

Moreover, the Rockefeller Foundation spearheaded the “Green Revolution,” an intervention that is as controversial as it is celebrated. In direct partnership with the Mexican government, the Rockefeller Foundation started a program to prevent food shortages through the development of high-yield varieties. The foundation provided scholarships and established experimental stations across Mexico to train agricultural scientists in Western scientific knowledge. The result was eventually an impressive increase in agricultural output, and the project was soon also tried in parts of Asia. In collaboration with multilateral organizations, the Rockefeller Foundation also set up the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), a global network of agricultural research institutes still operational to this day. The Green Revolution thus led to substantial developments both in research and agricultural development policies.³⁶

³¹ Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century*.

³² Moran, “Global philanthropy.”

³³ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, 98.

³⁴ Birn, *Marriage of Convenience*.

³⁵ Birn, *Marriage of Convenience*.

³⁶ Moran, “Global philanthropy.”

Even more important than its intellectual antecedent is the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (the Gates Foundation). With budgets that far exceeds other foundations, it has become a major political power. The Gates Foundation has three main programs: One which targets secondary and post-secondary education in the United States, one global development program on hunger and poverty crises, and one which focuses on global health, which is by far the largest and most impactful program of its programs.³⁷ Undoubtedly, the Gates Foundation has contributed greatly to the increase of global health spending, as well as boosting it with energy and political capital over the last decade. The resulting increase in programs, actors, and health initiatives can be said to have strengthened overall global health intervention.³⁸ The grants with perhaps the most far-reaching implications are the GAVI Alliance in 2000 and the Global Fund in 2002, contributing greatly to global health. These partnerships are now critical players in global health governance.³⁹

However, the size of the Gates Foundation's funding portfolio is so large that it contributes to shape the production of norms, ideas, and knowledge about what measures are needed to tackle global health issues.⁴⁰ Though limited, there has been a growing discontent of the Foundation with regard to its financial sources and financial spending strategies.⁴¹ Concerns have emerged about how their interaction is altering the global health agenda to favor technocratic quick fixes such as vaccines instead of investing in overall public health infrastructure.⁴² Their donations to a range of initiatives ensure that they often get a say in developing strategies and courses of action. As suggested by Laurie Garrett, virtually no major policy decisions take place in the WHO without being "casually, unofficially vetted by Gates Foundation staff".⁴³ Consequently, concerns as to who consented to the prominence of the Foundation and its power to shape the trajectory of global health are both justified and necessary.

³⁷ McCoy and McGoey, "Global Health and the Gates Foundation."

³⁸ Harman, "The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Legitimacy in Global Health Governance."

³⁹ Moran, "Global philanthropy."

⁴⁰ Harman, "The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Legitimacy in Global Health Governance."

⁴¹ McCoy et al. "The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's grant-making programme for global health."

⁴² The *Lancet*, "What has the Gates Foundation done for global health?"; Storeng, "The GAVI Alliance and the 'Gates approach' to health system strengthening."

⁴³ Garrett, "Money or Die: A Watershed Moment for Global Public Health."

The most important legacy of philanthropic foundations in global governance is that they can be seen as the earliest brokers of public-private partnerships.⁴⁴ Moran describe partnership brokerage as:

...a multifaceted process in which foundations deploy a mix of material resources (for example, seed finance) and in-kind resources (such as management advice) to structure relations between various (sometimes adversarial) actors. There are a number of complementary layers to the brokerage process, and these are particularly well suited to institutions such as foundations, which are capable of playing an intermediary role.⁴⁵

To exemplify, the Rockefeller Foundation was in the 90s one of the central players behind product development partnerships (PDPs) for health issues, such as the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative, bringing together private and public actors to incentivize product development. The Gates Foundation followed in their footsteps and soon became the major funder of almost all PDPs. The results of such PDPs have varied, but they remain important experiments of partnerships in global governance.⁴⁶ In this way, the Rockefeller and Gates Foundations can be said to have catalyzed the development of global health partnerships.

Despite being both celebrated and condemned, there is no denying that the influence of foundations such as the Gates Foundation has been both rapid and transformative. Since the 1990s, the architecture of global health governance has been revolutionized. Ruston and Williams claim that the wider international system has not seen such a shift since the creation of the modern multilateral system after the Second World War.⁴⁷ Today, philanthropic foundations position themselves as the innovative driving force in contemporary global health governance. Other actors are simply forced to adjust to the new circumstances.⁴⁸ By becoming key players with formal roles in governing and shaping the policy course of multi-stakeholder partnerships, foundations are further increasing their structural power.

⁴⁴ Moran, "Private Foundations and Global Health Partnerships."

⁴⁵ Moran, "Private Foundations and Global Health Partnerships", 134.

⁴⁶ Moran, "Global philanthropy."

⁴⁷ Rushton and Williams, *Partnerships and Foundations in Global Health*.

⁴⁸ Rushton and Williams, *Partnerships and Foundations in Global Health*.

As we have seen, private actors have become increasingly important players in global politics. This reallocation of authority to private actors has been described as the “private turn” in global governance.⁴⁹ Researchers across academic fields have for long studied how the new circumstances bring a significant “qualitative” shift to global governance.⁵⁰ However, there exists relatively few in-depth empirical case studies of private and multi-stakeholder initiatives that make up global political relations today. More research is needed to understand their role in global governance.

Public-private and multi-stakeholder governance

Over the past decades we have seen a rapidly growing presence of political initiatives that convene actors across sectors, such as partnerships, coalitions, and platforms. These are often described as public-private and multi-stakeholder partnerships.⁵¹ The resulting variety of innovative forms of governance can generally be referred to as multi-sector, multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance.⁵² The literature demonstrates an “institutional ambiguity about the appropriate terms” of such cross-sectoral engagement, and also what it entails in terms of responsibilities.⁵³ Andonova defines global public-private partnerships as:

Voluntary agreements between public actors (IOs, states, or substate public authorities) and non-state actors (nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), companies, foundations, etc.) on a set of governance objectives and norms, rules, practices, or implementation procedures and their attainment across multiple jurisdictions and levels of governance.⁵⁴

Bull and McNeill on the other hand have a more restricted definition. They define private actors as “non-state individuals or organizations that operate for profit or are closely connected to for-profit organizations.”⁵⁵ In addition to for-profit corporations,

⁴⁹ Rushton and Williams, *Partnerships and Foundations in Global Health*, 2.

⁵⁰ Bull et al., “Private Sector Influence in the Multilateral System,” 484.

⁵¹ Andonova et al. *Partnerships for Sustainability in Contemporary Global Governance*.

⁵² Picciotto, “Introduction: reconceptualizing regulation in the era of globalization”; Held, *Global Covenant*; Gleckman, *Multistakeholder Governance and Democracy*.

⁵³ Patay et al. “Fifty shades of partnerships,” 2.

⁵⁴ Andonova, *Governance Entrepreneurs*, 2.

⁵⁵ Bull and McNeill, *Development Issues in Global Governance*, 6.

public-private partnerships can according to Bull and McNeill's definition therefore also include business associations as well as non-profit private foundations that are closely linked with for-profit businesses. This definition thus excludes other civil society actors such as non-profit non-governmental organizations.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships are largely defined in the same way and the two terms are often used interchangeably. However, the term multi-stakeholder partnerships also captures collaborations that do not directly engage public authority. The term thus also includes collaborations between solely non-state actors, such as academic institutions, private foundations, and corporations. Andonova and colleagues make another significant analytical distinction. In public-private partnerships, roles and authority are usually defined and made explicit, and the public government authority remains a key player in this regard. The concept of multi-stakeholder partnerships on the other hand "captures a more general move toward multiple types of network-based authoritative arrangements in international governance, beyond the traditional assumption of the monopoly of the state."⁵⁶ The term partnerships per se is arguably a more general term, which can be used to capture all possible types of collaborative arrangements between public, private, and civil society actors. As defined by the United Nations, partnerships are:

Voluntary and collaborative relationships between various parties, both public and non-public, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task and as mutually agreed, to share risks and responsibilities, resources and benefits.⁵⁷

Initiatives that convene stakeholders from a broader specter of society are often referred to as the gold standard of international private governance these days,⁵⁸ and have now become institutionalized as critical institutions in global governance. This is particularly so after the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015.

Partnerships are often perceived as the best option when trying to solve so-called

⁵⁶ Andonova et al., *Partnerships for Sustainability in Contemporary Global Governance*, 3-4.

⁵⁷ UN General Assembly, "Towards global partnerships," 4.

⁵⁸ Schleifer, "Varieties of multi-stakeholder governance."

“wicked problems”.⁵⁹ With increasingly complex governance issues, there is an emerging recognition that we need new, more democratic, and more effective global governance systems.⁶⁰ Advocates argue that partnerships bring multiple benefits, hereunder innovation and flexibility as well as targeted policy interventions, increased implementation and new mechanisms for enforcement.⁶¹ The interaction may bring substantial learning, and provide valuable contributions to states and the multilateral institutions’ efforts at solving development issues.⁶² And importantly, multi-stakeholder governance can be perceived as an inclusive governance process where more stakeholders can be involved in policy directly.⁶³ However, such governance initiatives also brings with it challenges. The large number of new actors that interact and must agree may result in political gridlock, competition, and loss of accountability and responsibility.⁶⁴ Concerns have been raised whether the multitude of initiatives contribute to the fragmentation of cooperation and governance.⁶⁵ Critics have also claimed multilateral institutions have become too influenced by corporate elites, and that they therefore no longer find themselves in a position to act independently.⁶⁶ While there are several reasons for concern, with the realities of politics today it is hard to argue that global governance could be anything but complex and diverse.

Due to the increasing volume of initiatives - and the speed of which they develop - one can refer to “multistakeholderism” as an emerging governance form. Gleckman makes the distinction between individual multi-stakeholder projects and the term multistakeholderism, where the latter is used “to reflect the theory of global governance” demonstrated by the proliferation of such initiatives.⁶⁷ He sees multistakeholderism as a proposal for a new international structure more fit for the globalized world. He finds it troubling that this development is happening at record speed, and without a proper public conversation around the democratic deficit it brings to our governance structures:

⁵⁹ Lönngren and Poeck, “Wicked problems.”

⁶⁰ Gleckman, *Multistakeholder Governance and Democracy*.

⁶¹ Bloodgood, “New Multilateralism.”

⁶² Bull and McNeill, *Development Issues in Global Governance*, 177.

⁶³ Gleckman, *Multistakeholder Governance and Democracy*.

⁶⁴ Bloodgood, “New Multilateralism.”

⁶⁵ Zammit, *Development at Risk*.

⁶⁶ Richter, “‘We the Peoples’ or ‘We the Corporations’?”

⁶⁷ Gleckman, *Multistakeholder Governance and Democracy*, xiv.

Contemporary multistakeholderism however does not offer any clarity on how it will enhance global democracy. It also has not yet clarified how the current exclusive responsibilities and obligations of nation-states will shift when powerful non-state actors have a formal or semi-formal decision-making role in international relations.⁶⁸

Multistakeholderism, “market multilateralism,”⁶⁹ and “new multilateralism”,⁷⁰ are all terms posed to capture these new dynamics where a multitude of actors, often through innovative hybrid partnership forms, engage in global politics. It creates a more complex governance system more dominated by networks of governance. As Andonova argues, partnerships have:

...changed how the multilateral system governs. They have introduced a model of governance that is decentralized, networked, and voluntary and that melds the public purpose of formal organizations with private practice. These features can enable some actors to engage in collective action before a broad consensus is achieved, to experiment with innovative solutions, and, in some instances, but not all, to make significant contribution to the production of public goods.⁷¹

More research is needed to understand what consequences this new phenomenon brings, and whether it is a positive or negative development. Research has up until now shown that multistakeholderism tends to leave the roles of states unclear, and many are concerned that democratic principles such as representation, transparency, and accountability are not being sufficiently met.⁷² For such initiatives to become successful, it is therefore central to address power asymmetries. If these questions remain unanswered, multi-stakeholder initiatives can end up simply becoming platforms for the powerful to advance their interests.⁷³

As Andonova argues, there is an unresolved debate on the nature of global partnerships – a debate with a corresponding need for further insight into both the what and the how:

⁶⁸ Gleckman, *Multistakeholder Governance and Democracy*, xv.

⁶⁹ Bull and McNeill, *Development Issues in Global Governance*.

⁷⁰ Bloodgood, “New Multilateralism.”

⁷¹ Andonova, *Governance Entrepreneurs*, 3.

⁷² HLPE, *Multistakeholder Partnerships to Finance and Improve Food Security and Nutrition in the Framework of the 2030 Agenda*.

⁷³ Canfield et al. “UN Food Systems Summit 2021.”

We need to inquire what kinds of actors engage in the establishment of new mechanisms of governance across public and private domains – what are the drivers of such entrepreneurship and what political conditions facilitate or limit the scope of public-private collaboration. We also need more systematic empirical evidence on the outcomes of global partnerships in terms of the governance priorities and instruments they bring to the multilateral system to start addressing contentious policy debates.⁷⁴

Multistakeholderism in global governance of food

EAT can be said to work within a broad governance field that includes areas such as global health, food, agriculture, sustainability, and development. Although these fields are intrinsically interlinked, they are often governed and researched separately. The broader academic discussion on food is spread over a variety of sub-fields like nutrition, public health, agriculture, food policy, food security, and development. Compared to other areas of global and international relations, global governance of food is an understudied domain with a small body of literature.⁷⁵ Periods of food crises have sporadically led to an upsurge in research on the topic within the fields of international relations and global governance,⁷⁶ but global food governance can still be seen as largely virgin territory.⁷⁷ Accordingly, knowledge on the topic in general, and on food governance, is fragmented. As an interdisciplinary topic, I find it necessary to draw on several schools and disciplines. The terms global food governance and global governance of food are here used in a broader sense, incorporating literature from fields such as food security governance, food policy, food systems governance etc.

Global governance of food must be described as a highly complex and fragmented policy field. For the past century, many movements and actors have sought to build a multilateral system able to provide food security founded on democratic principles.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Andonova, *Governance Entrepreneurs*, 4-5.

⁷⁵ Margulis, "The Global Governance of Food Security."

⁷⁶ Margulis, "The Global Governance of Food Security."

⁷⁷ Candel, "Food security governance."

⁷⁸ Canfield et al. "UN Food Systems Summit 2021."

Such a system would be built on the perspective of food as a human right where states are the responsible and accountable part to provide food security. However, this vision has been challenging to bring about in practice. The multilateral architecture built to govern food has been referred to as a “regime complex,”⁷⁹ meaning “a set of overlapping and perhaps even contradictory regimes that share a common focus.”⁸⁰ The central problem is that there is no encompassing body of institution with sufficient authority and comprehensive mandate to truly address food security across all sectors.⁸¹ Separate UN institutions with different mandates and missions are designed to manage the various issues related to food: Health at the World Health Organization (WHO), food and agriculture at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), nutrition at the UN System Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN) now part of the new UN Nutrition, and environment at the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). Further, we have the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). The organizations have different missions and mandates, but their roles and topics often overlap. Importantly, none of the UN institutions have authority over key issues determining the functioning of our food systems, such as economic stability, finance, and trade regulations. As such, we see an inability to address the forces driving food systems that fall in between the silos. Although there are plenty of examples of good cooperation between the UN agencies, there has also been a tendency of poor coordination and rivalry.⁸² While progress certainly has been made, the multilateral system designed to enhance food security must be regarded as largely ineffective.⁸³

At the same time, efforts to build a multilateral system to provide the right to food have consistently been undermined by powerful actors instead promoting free trade, financialization of food and markets, regulatory fragmentation, and large-scale industrial agriculture.⁸⁴ An overall liberalization of the world economy has made food a profitable commodity. Large multinational food companies have for long operated in a

⁷⁹ Margulis, “The Regime Complex for Food Security.”

⁸⁰ Alter and Raustiala, “The Rise of International Regime Complexity,” 330.

⁸¹ Candel, “Food security governance.”

⁸² Margulis, “The Global Governance of Food Security.”

⁸³ Clapp, “Food and hunger.”

⁸⁴ Canfield et al. “UN Food Systems Summit 2021.”

thriving industry with increasing revenues.⁸⁵ Through their market power, the private sector has come to hold substantial power over food systems and the politics of food. The situation can be visualized as an hourglass, where the multinational companies constitute the restrictive slim point between the large masses of consumers and producers.⁸⁶ The multinational companies' power over the political agenda has by many been described as a "corporate capture", heavily influencing food systems by advocating market-based solutions to improve global food security such as green technology, innovation, free trade, and long value chains.⁸⁷ Many would argue such interventions are what caused the food system failures we are facing today.⁸⁸

Importantly, the politics of food also faces a broad specter of challenges due to the absence of a common vision on what an effective and fair food system is. Most agree on the fact that our food system is failing us and that we need to do something about it. However, we are far from having the same opinion on what failure is about and thus what we should do to change course. Béné et al. have given a recent overview of four different narratives that exist today about the failure of food systems: (1) Inability to feed the world population, (2) inability to deliver a healthy diet, (3) inability to produce equal and equitable benefits, and (4) unsustainability and the negative impact the system has on the environment.⁸⁹ Such different starting points result in diverging views on solutions and models for transformation. Do we need new technological innovations to make industrial agricultural practices more sustainable or do we need a fundamentally new model of agriculture? Should we continue to liberalize global food markets to enhance productivity and access to affordable food or should we strengthen national and regional trade regulations to ensure more food sovereignty? The scientific communities engaging with the food agenda bring many models and solutions that are often in direct conflict. Science feeds directly into highly polarized ideational debates around which models should be prioritized. The tension brings a disjointed political discourse in which "advocates of different models talk past one another and fail to fully

⁸⁵ Sorvino, "Forbes Global 2000."

⁸⁶ Clapp and Scott, "Introduction: The Global Environmental Politics of Food."

⁸⁷ Clapp, "The rise of big food and agriculture," 58.

⁸⁸ Fakhri, "Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Michael Fakhri."

⁸⁹ Béné et al. "When food systems meet sustainability."

engage in productive dialogue on pathways forward.”⁹⁰ Accordingly, global governance of food can also be characterized as a highly conflicted area of global governance.

The fragmentation is further exacerbated by the multitude of actors and partnerships involved in food systems governance. Civil society actors such as peasant organizations, human rights activists, philanthropic foundations, and non-governmental organizations are increasingly involved in shaping the policy outcome.⁹¹ Particularly the Gates Foundation has as discussed above become a significant player in the broader field of food and health by initiating and funding several research centers and public-private and multi-stakeholder initiatives to address the interlinked issues of food security, agriculture, health, and nutrition. Among these are the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), Food and Land Use Coalition (FOLU), Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), and the International Food Policy Research Institute (part of the above mentioned CGIAR).

The increase in private authority and multi-stakeholder political initiatives is seen in all parts of global governance but is particularly prominent in the areas of health, food, and the environment.⁹² For this reason, global governance of food is an important field to study, as it can be said to be “...at the cutting edge of new forms of inter-organizational arrangements for 21st century challenges.”⁹³ Since the food crisis in 2007-2008 we have seen a range of institutional reforms and innovations. The UN tried to promote a unified response to the crisis by establishing a High-Level Task Force of several multilateral institutions.⁹⁴ In 2010, the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement (SUN), a partnership of governments, multilateral organizations, private and civil society actors, was established to reduce stunting. The partnership has become one of the largest and most institutionalized within nutrition.⁹⁵ The Group of 8 (G8) also entered the food agenda in 2012 by launching the public-private partnership New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition (NAFSN) to address rural poverty in sub-Saharan Africa.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Clapp and Scott, “Introduction: The Global Environmental Politics of Food,” 4.

⁹¹ Margulis, “The Global Governance of Food Security.”

⁹² Andonova, “Governance Entrepreneurs.”

⁹³ Margulis, “The Global Governance of Food Security.”

⁹⁴ Un.org, “Establishing the HLFT in 2008.”

⁹⁵ Lie, “Unpacking the politics of global public-private partnerships in global nutrition governance.”

⁹⁶ Clapp, “Food and hunger.”

Importantly, the food crisis spurred significant institutional reforms to the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). Since its establishment in 1974, it the Committee had largely failed to perform as a well-functioning forum to address food policy coordination.⁹⁷ By developing new mechanisms to include private sector and civil society voices in the deliberations, the CFS has now come to be regarded the most inclusive multi-stakeholder governance body we have to this date.⁹⁸

Multistakeholderism as an emerging governance form has become even more pronounced after the recent UN Food Systems Summit in 2021. The purpose of the summit was to build momentum for delivering on all sustainable development goals through a food systems approach. As such, it was the first global conference on food to be organized under the sustainable development umbrella by the Office of the Secretary-General, not by the Rome-based UN agencies working on food security. Further, it adopted a systems approach to food, which entailed setting “its sight on a more ambitious scope of societal and economic transformation” than previously.⁹⁹ The Summit was arranged as a massive multi-stakeholder event at a level and scale we have never seen before. All actors with a stake in the food system and with the desire to participate were welcomed. As it was held during the Covid-19 pandemic, it took on a digital format. The organizers called it a “People’s Summit”, opening for individual participation from all around the world. The Summit was an 18-month long process of mobilizing at various levels through various work streams. One example was the national multi-stakeholder dialogues arranged by UN Member States to explore national pathways to food systems transformation. Another was the five Action Tracks set up to accelerate global food systems transformation around five topics: food security, sustainable consumption, nature-positive production, equitable livelihoods and food systems resilience. The Action Tracks were led by non-state actors such as EAT and GAIN and were conducted as a series of multi-stakeholder dialogues held on Zoom.

⁹⁷ Clapp, “Food and hunger.”

⁹⁸ Fao.org, “Committee on World Food Security.”

⁹⁹ Fakhri, “The Food System Summit’s Disconnection From People’s Real Needs,” 3.

The UN Food Systems Summit has been described as innovative and bold, and the food systems approach has been applauded.¹⁰⁰ But the Summit has also been subject to substantial criticism. First, participants and even organizers have described the entire process as opaque and confusing.¹⁰¹ Roles, responsibility, and accountability for participants were unclear. The digital format was complex and challenging to navigate, especially for marginalized groups and interest groups with limited time and resources to spend on the summit. Further, the Summit has been criticized for not being sufficiently democratic and legitimate and for being too aligned with corporate and philanthropic interests.¹⁰² The most prominent example of this was the decision to have a Special Envoy from outside the UN system to oversee the whole summit. The Secretary-General appointed Agnes Kalibata, President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), an organization working to improve food security in Africa. Critics have argued that AGRA, which was founded by the Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation,¹⁰³ represents agri-business under the guise of being African farmer led.¹⁰⁴ Many found Agnes Kalibata's leadership to be a clear conflict of interest, and that she is not a legitimate leader to take a leading role in developing a people's summit to address issues with the global food systems.¹⁰⁵

Leading up to the Summit, it became clear that the event was organized by a few individual experts from civil society organizations with close affiliation to the World Economic Forum (WEF) and mega philanthropies such as the Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation.¹⁰⁶ According to the Special Rapporteur on the right to food Michael Fakhri, the WEF "...was granted a specific role as a cross-cutting lever of change throughout the Summit Process," and has together with partners designed large parts of the Summit agenda.¹⁰⁷ The Summit process was met with skepticism early on. By March 2020, close to 550 civil society organizations, social movements, and

¹⁰⁰ Canfield et al. "Reconfiguring Food Systems Governance."

¹⁰¹ Andersson et al. "Debrief on the United Nations Food Systems Summit."

¹⁰² Clapp et al. "The Food Systems Summit's Failure to Address Corporate Power"; Canfield et al. "UN Food Systems Summit 2021"; Montenegro de Wit et al. "Editorial: Resetting Power in Global Food Governance."

¹⁰³ Rockefellerfoundation.org, "Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa."

¹⁰⁴ Chandrasekaran et al. "Exposing corporate capture of the UNFSS through multistakeholderism," 11.

¹⁰⁵ CSIPM, "Letter to the Secretary-General."

¹⁰⁶ Fakhri, "The Food System Summit's Disconnection From People's Real Needs", 3.

¹⁰⁷ Fakhri, "Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Michael Fakhri," 12.

universities reached out to the UN Secretary-General, calling for a reconsideration of the Summit. They were worried about the corporate influence WEF had demonstrated over the UN after their strategic partnership agreement in 2019, gradually establishing “stakeholder capitalism” as global governance model.¹⁰⁸

An editorial in a special issue of the journal *Development* dedicated to the consequences of the recent Summit states that the Summit was “much more than an ambitious meeting. It was an ongoing process, poised to significantly reset power relations in global food security governance.”¹⁰⁹ The authors were in “shock and awe” over the amount of power delegated to non-state actors, and worried about the influence the WEF has in the UN system after signing a strategic partnership agreement in 2019.¹¹⁰ Further, although the adoption of a food systems approach was largely seen as an important and necessary step, the broadening of scope opens the door for new political and epistemic battles over what a sustainable food system is and what role and responsibility the various actors participating in the food chain should take. In largely avoiding any discussion on how food systems are fundamentally undemocratic and shaped by relations of power, the Summit organizers were accused of seeking to change the political course in a way that would favor private interests.¹¹¹

Canfield and colleagues thus argue that the Summit is “reshaping global food systems governance and the very foundations of authority and legitimacy in global governance.”¹¹² Many questions remain unanswered, and there is a critical need for more research of current governance arrangements and developments. In this regard, it is necessary to understand the role of private actors and partnerships in spearheading institutional change. In a recent review of multi-stakeholder initiatives in global governance, Manahan and Kumar refer to a new generation of initiatives that seek to “...advance a paradigm/ideology/concept that attempts to re-engineer global governance”.¹¹³ EAT is an example of one of the initiatives they describe as aggressive

¹⁰⁸ CSIPM, “Letter to the Secretary-General.”

¹⁰⁹ Montenegro de Wit et al. “Editorial: Resetting Power in Global Food Governance,” 154.

¹¹⁰ McMichael, “Shock and Awe in the UNFSS.”

¹¹¹ Canfield et al. “Reconfiguring Food Systems Governance.”

¹¹² Canfield et al. “Reconfiguring Food Systems Governance,” 189.

¹¹³ Manahan and Kumar, “The Great Takeover,” 37.

and ambitious in scope and call for more research on how and to what degree they are challenging existing governance institutions. They argue it becomes imperative to know more of these actors and the motives and values they operate from.

Global governance of food is still to some extent virgin territory with a lot of potential for further research.¹¹⁴ The imminent questions remain unanswered: How can food systems be governed? Who holds the power, and what are these actors' claims to authority and legitimacy? What factors determine political priorities? In exploring novel governance forms for 21st century challenges, it is critical to not lose sight of the fundamental questions occupying the study of political science. The recent developments within global governance in general, and within food politics in particular, make a strong case for more in-depth studies of private foundations and multi-stakeholder partnerships and their role in shaping global political relations.

¹¹⁴ Candel, "Food Security Governance"; Margulis, "The Global Governance of Food Security."

3. Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

In this chapter, I review some of the concept, theories, and analytical frameworks applied in the literature on private and multi-stakeholder actors for understanding their role in global governance. I introduce the conceptual framework developed by Shiffman and colleagues to study the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks and explain why this framework is suitable for answering my research question. Finally, I present the framework more thoroughly and comment on how I use it to structure my analysis.

Assessing influence and effectiveness

There is a comprehensive body of academic literature concerned with private and multi-stakeholder actors' influence in global governance. Influence, power, and effectiveness are all different but similar analytical concepts used to answer many of the same questions across academic fields. Influence is here understood as “the power to have an effect on people or things.”¹¹⁵ This is closely related to the concept of power. Power is often understood in relational terms, such as the Weberian definition of power as the “probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability exists.”¹¹⁶ Or put more simply in the definition provided by Robert Dahl: “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.”¹¹⁷

Classical definitions of power contain an element of coercion. However, many non-state actors do not necessarily have such relational power, and it is necessary to take notice of the more subtle forms of power. Central in this regard is what Joseph Nye has coined soft power, understood as having the power to get others to want the same thing as you

¹¹⁵ Cambridge Dictionary, “Influence.”

¹¹⁶ Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 52.

¹¹⁷ Dahl, “The Concept of Power,” 202-203.

want, without any element of coercion.¹¹⁸ Soft power resources, such as the ability to shape norms and ideas, are often used by non-state actors. For instance, Finnemore argues that non-governmental organizations often “act as ‘teachers’ and contribute to policy change through changing policymakers’ beliefs about appropriate policy.”¹¹⁹

Doris Fuchs has developed a theoretical framework that has been applied to analyze power dynamics in food and agriculture governance.¹²⁰ She defines power in terms of an actor’s ability “to pursue successfully a desired political objective”.¹²¹ In her article “Commanding heights? The strength and fragility of business in global politics”, Fuchs analyzes business power by looking at three variations of power: instrumental, structural and discursive. Instrumental power is understood as the direct influence one actor has over another to affect a political outcome. This can be attained through resources such as technology, finance, knowledge or other sorts of human resources. Structural power refers to the power one actor has over the other because of dependence that comes from resources such as funding, information and expertise. Structural power can also come from holding a prestigious position in a hierarchical institution of some kind. Discursive power can be obtained by defining the discourse, shaping the agenda and influencing norms and perceptions. This can for instance be developed through instrumental resources such as funding for research.¹²² Fuchs’ framework arguably captures several prevalent sources of power beyond the case of business power in global governance of food.

Moon takes this a step further. Based on a literature review, she provides a typology of eight kinds of power derived from global health governance research: Physical, economic, structural, institutional, moral, discursive, expert, and network. She finds that policy actors may influence governance from eight sources of power: economic power, which involves using material resources; institutional power, through established rules and processes in governance and decision-making; expert power, which is based on recognized knowledge or skills; discursive power, by being able to shape the way others

¹¹⁸ Nye, “Soft Power.”

¹¹⁹ Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society*.

¹²⁰ Clapp and Fuchs, *Corporate Power in Global Agrifood Governance*.

¹²¹ Fuchs, “Commanding heights?” 774.

¹²² Fuchs, “Commanding heights?”

think; moral power, which is the ability to shape the moral principles of others; network power, which is the ability to harness the collective power of others; structural power, which is enabled by the structures of society (such as governments); and physical power, through the use of force.¹²³ Moon thus provides a more comprehensive framework for analyzing a broad specter of actors in global health specifically and global governance more broadly.

Although it is different from the concept of power, the concept of effectiveness can also be useful when investigating the influence of private actors that are more loosely organized, such as networks and multi-stakeholder partnerships. The concept of effectiveness can be defined in several ways and are often based on the criteria of output, outcome and impact. In literature on partnerships, effectiveness is often understood as the extent to which the initiative contributes to solving or mitigating the problems they are designed to address.¹²⁴ To be effective can also simply be understood as being “successful or achieving the results you want”.¹²⁵ Since the purpose of many political initiatives is to influence the agenda in order to achieve a certain goal, investigating conditions that enable effectiveness have several parallels to that of examining influence and power.

Many theoretical frameworks proposing factors that enable institutional effectiveness have been put forward in the global governance literature.¹²⁶ Several of these are concerned about features of the organization, such as having material resources and effective leadership. But by being inherently embedded in complex governance systems, it is equally important to understand the external factors influencing effectiveness. For instance, partnership implementation and effectiveness can be influenced by global external factors, such as market dynamics the partnership rely on for resources and outcomes.¹²⁷

Based on the multitude of theoretical foundations brought forward in the literature, Andonova, Faul and Piselli have recently developed a framework with a set of pathways

¹²³ Moon, “Power in global governance.”

¹²⁴ Andonova and Faul, “The Effectiveness of Partnerships”.

¹²⁵ Cambridge Dictionary, “Effective.”

¹²⁶ For a comprehensive overview, see Andonova and Faul, “The Effectiveness of Partnerships,” 33-34.

¹²⁷ Reinsberg and Westwinter, “The Global Governance of International Development”.

and conditions that underpin partnership effectiveness. They propose four propositions to partnership features that are likely to enable effectiveness: (1) sophisticated contracting, (2) credible commitment of resources, (3) processes that facilitate the adaptability of partnership arrangements, and (4) an environment that foster innovation. Based on these conditions, Andonova and colleagues propose a set of pathways that allow for examining partnership effectiveness empirically. The five pathways are: (1) contribution to problem solving for sustainability, (2) goal attainment, (3) value for partners, (4) collaboration inside the partnership, and (5) impact on affected populations. The theoretical framework can be used on a variety of actors within different issue areas.¹²⁸

As mentioned previously, the global health literature has paid attention to the rise of global health networks and their influence in politics and policy. In their research, Shiffman and colleagues have developed a framework of factors that can help explain why such networks emerge and why they become effective or not in influencing the political agenda. Shiffman and colleagues apply an understanding of effectiveness as “the extent to which networks are able to change the world to meet their members’ perceptions of what reality should look like.”¹²⁹ In the case of health networks, this usually involves raising attention and resources to a specific health issue. Shiffman and colleagues identify three categories of factors that enable effectiveness: (1) Network and actor features, such as leadership, governance, composition of actors, and framing strategies, (2) the policy environment, entailing factors such as allies and opponents, funding, and norms, and (3) characteristics of the issue that the network is addressing, such as how severe it is, what groups are affected, and how difficult the issue is to solve.

Shiffman et al. find that the factors that influence network effectiveness are also relevant for understanding why and how these actors connect and start collaborating in the first place.¹³⁰ For instance, one of the pathways for effectiveness in the framework developed by Andonova, Faul and Piselli is that the partnership is able to create value for the partners. One could say that this perceived value is one of the same reasons for

¹²⁸ Andonova et al. *Partnerships for Sustainability in Contemporary Global Governance*.

¹²⁹ Shiffman et al. “A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks,” 6.

¹³⁰ Shiffman et al. “A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks.”

why these partners found each other in the first place. Hence, factors that explain effectiveness may also explain emergence. In addition to assessing influence and effectiveness, it is also interesting to examine how and why an initiative like EAT emerged. Compared to an analysis of power, I find these questions to be a better analytical approach to explore EAT's role in global governance of food.

Accordingly, I would argue that the framework of factors that enable the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks is very well suited for an analysis of EAT. Although EAT can be understood as both a private foundation, a partnership, and a multi-stakeholder initiative, it can also be seen as an advocacy group or a network working to influence the political agenda. Before it was established as an independent foundation in 2016, EAT was a loosely organized initiative financially supported by a private foundation attempting to encourage an academic and political debate around the interconnections of food, health, and sustainability. Further, it collaborates with a larger network of partners and allies. As such, it makes sense to analyze EAT through a network perspective. It is not self-evident that it would crystallize in the first place, nor that it gained further traction and evolved into a proper organization.

Importantly, to bring about evidence for an actor's influence or the effectiveness of a partnership is a demanding task. First, it can be challenging to establish a causal connection between the object or subject being influenced and its causes. Further, one must take into account the potential effect of other factors and pre-existing conditions.¹³¹ When assessing partnership effectiveness, we also often face the challenge that the initiatives are in their first years of existence, which makes the analysis rather premature.¹³² These challenges are all evident in the case of EAT. This thesis therefore limits the analysis to discuss conditions that enable emergence and effectiveness. In answering the research question on how EAT emerged as an influential actor, the analysis sheds light to the role EAT plays in global food governance.

¹³¹ Andonova and Faul, "The Effectiveness of Partnerships."

¹³² McGann, "Think Tanks and Global Policy Networks."

Analytical framework

Shiffman and colleagues draw on multiple social science studies to present a conceptual framework to explore the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks.¹³³ The framework consists of 10 factors in three different categories: (1) Network and actor features, concerning the factors of leadership, governance, composition of actors, and framing strategies, (2) policy environment, concerning allies and opponents, funding, and norms, and (3) issue characteristics, including severity, tractability, affected groups (see figure 1). In the following section, I briefly describe the different categories and factors, before I comment on how I use it to structure my analysis.

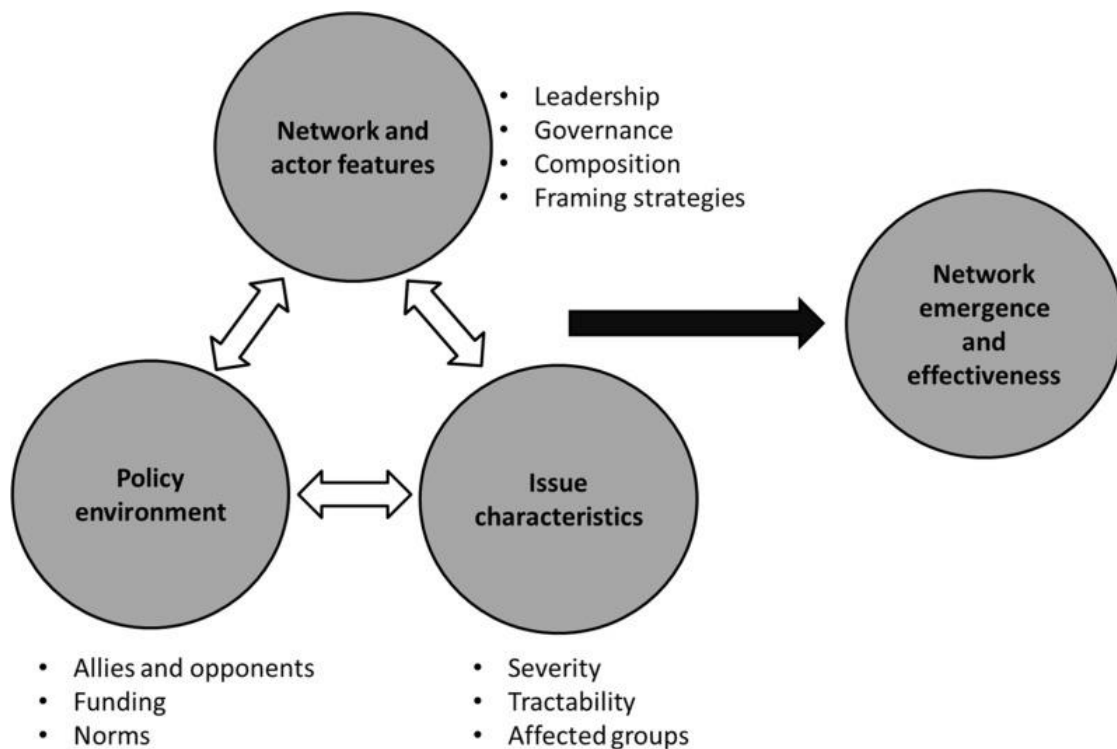


Figure 1: A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks.¹³⁴

¹³³ Shiffman et al. "A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks," i6.

¹³⁴ Shiffman et al. "A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks," i7.

Network and actor features

Network and actor features concerns factors internal to the network. This category draws on the presumption that networks have agency, but their capacity to transform the world vary significantly. First, effective *leadership* to steer the network is of particular importance. Successful leaders demonstrate abilities and features such as charisma, credibility, and competence. They are often excellent coalition builders, have great rhetorical skills, and know how to mobilize a sense of mission.¹³⁵

Second, networks are more likely to emerge and be effective if they adopt appropriate *governance* structures to facilitate collaboration and avoid destructive disputes.

Governance is here understood as “how an organization steers itself to achieve goals its members agree to.”¹³⁶ Networks vary in their governance models, but Shiffman and colleagues find three primary modes: (1) responsibility is shared among members of the network, (2) one individual or organization in the network take a leading role, or (3) the network sets up a separate administrative organization with mandates to govern the network and its activities. It is not that one model is better than the others. What is important is whether the network adopts a suitable governance model that is congruent with the characteristics of the initiative.¹³⁷

Further, it is relevant to look at the *composition of actors* involved in the network. Here, the literature is quite ambivalent. On the one hand, groups that are homogeneous often benefit from being diverse. Diversity is known to foster more innovation and learning. On the other hand, homogeneous groups might also be more prone to disagreement and conflict.¹³⁸

Lastly, Shiffman and colleagues emphasize the importance of adopting successful *framing strategies*. Networks often differ in their capacity to develop successful frames, a crucial component for attracting attention and resources. An example is the HIV/AIDS communities that effectively framed the disease as an existential threat to humanity and succeeded in drawing attention to the issue.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Shiffman et al. “A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks,” i7.

¹³⁶ Shiffman et al. “A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks,” i7.

¹³⁷ Shiffman et al. “A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks,” i7-i9.

¹³⁸ Shiffman et al. “A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks,” i9.

¹³⁹ Shiffman et al. “A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks,” i9.

Policy environment

While characteristics of the network are central to emergence and effectiveness, it is evident that networks do not operate in a vacuum and are highly dependent on forces outside them. The second category of the framework thus concerns factors external to the network that influence both its nature and effects. The first factor of this category entails what Shiffman and colleagues describe as *allies and opponents*. Networks are more likely to emerge and thrive if they have allies. Conversely, political initiatives may be impeded if met with resistance. However, opposition also has the potential to mobilize network expansion. In sum, it is therefore not obvious how opposition plays out, and the interesting analysis lies in the combination of favorable and unfortunate effects.¹⁴⁰

Another factor is that of how the broader policy environment perceives a network's *funding* strategies. Although funding can arguably be seen as a factor internal to the network, Shiffman and colleagues place it as a factor external to the network. They reflect on the fact that financial security is not a prerequisite for success. Networks that do not rely on financial incentives are often perceived more legitimate. However, funding does not have to be an issue if obtained from trusted sources. To understand whether funding is perceived illegitimate or not, it is thus necessary to examine the specific policy context.¹⁴¹

Finally, the framework posits that networks are enabled and hampered by existing *norms*, meaning “standards of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity.”¹⁴² To give an example, it will be challenging for a network to attract resources for safe abortion in environments that consider this an intervention that takes the life of a child.

Issue characteristics

Finally, in studying the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks, it is necessary to analyze characteristics of the issue the network addresses, such as *severity*,

¹⁴⁰ Shiffman et al. “A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks,” i9.

¹⁴¹ Shiffman et al. “A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks,” i9.

¹⁴² Shiffman et al. “A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks,” i9.

tractability, and *affected groups*. Global health networks are more likely to emerge if the health issue is either life threatening or potentially critically lowering the quality of life for the affected group. Networks are also more likely to emerge and be effective if the *affected groups* consist of resourceful people that can advocate their cause, than if the affected groups are marginalized. Further, a network is more likely to emerge and be effective if the health issue is perceived as tractable. If the issue is challenging to solve, it can be difficult to mobilize resources and other forms of support.¹⁴³ However, the effect of the distinct factors is not straightforward. For instance, alcohol abuse is a serious health issue affecting millions of people around the world, but the network of researchers that once were successful in bringing the issue to the agenda now struggles to build a larger coalition that can lead to political changes. Another example is the difference between the two global health networks advocating support around the two illnesses pneumonia and tuberculosis. The illnesses are about as severe, but the network on tuberculosis has been much more successful in its efforts.¹⁴⁴

In total, the framework provides a set of conditions that offer a useful point of departure for exploring an initiative like EAT. Importantly, the goal of this thesis is not to evaluate the applicability or validity of the framework. Instead, it has been applied as an analytical tool to approach my data.

¹⁴³ Shiffman et al. "A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks," i9-i10.

¹⁴⁴ Shiffman et al. "The emergence and effectiveness of global health networks," 111.

4. Methods

This thesis is a case study of the EAT Foundation that aims to explore its role within the broader governance field of food. To understand a contemporary, unstudied phenomenon like EAT, it is appropriate to adopt a case study design. Yin defines case study as:

An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.¹⁴⁵

The research has been guided by three broad objectives: to examine what kind of initiative EAT is, how it came about, and what influence it holds. My main method is document analysis, supplemented by a few key informant interviews. At the same time, the research has been significantly informed by theory since I have been reviewing academic literature simultaneously while collecting and analyzing the data. The process has thus been iterative, where new insights continuously shaped the analysis along the way. To give an example, I initially approached EAT as a multi-stakeholder initiative, reviewing literature on the effectiveness and influence of partnerships. However, as I gained more knowledge of EAT, I quickly found it more valuable to analyze the initiative through a network perspective. The framework developed by Shiffman and colleagues to understand the emergence and effectiveness of networks in global health thus provided a good analytical approach and an appropriate frame to structure my analysis.

Qualitative research like this study necessitates robust techniques for data collection and documentation of the research process.¹⁴⁶ In this chapter, I will therefore describe the research process in more details and reflect on limitations concerning my methodology. I start by describing how I collected and analyzed my data through document analysis and key informant interviews. Then, I reflect on my positionality as a researcher before I comment on ethical considerations.

¹⁴⁵ Yin, *Case Study Research*, 16.

¹⁴⁶ Bowen, “Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method,” 29.

Data collection and data analysis

Document analysis

Document analysis is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies. Collecting empirical data from publicly available sources is a useful place to start when diving into a topic or subject we know little of. Bowen define document analysis as “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material.”¹⁴⁷ He understands documents as both texts and images that have been produced without the researcher’s intervention. O’Leary on the other hand defines document analysis in more narrow terms, limiting the analysis to that of written documents such as reports, journals, and policy documents.¹⁴⁸ I take the broader understanding of document analysis as analyzing “any symbolic representation that can be recorded and retrieved for description and analysis,”¹⁴⁹ including sources like online webpages, news articles, published reports, video recordings from EAT’s events, bibliographies, documentaries, podcasts, and academic literature.

In doing document analysis it is essential to have an open, but critical and analytical mind in approaching the data. Much of the data informing my thesis originates from private sources, which reliability can be questioned. I have therefore carefully assessed the authenticity of the source and attempted to triangulate findings whenever possible. Throughout the process of collecting and analyzing data, I have asked myself questions like; is this an authentic and credible source? How and by whom was the source produced? What do we know of this person and their intentions? What is the context? In addition to using explicit information found in the document, I have analyzed the document in itself as an interesting source, following Atkinson and Coffey:

Texts are constructed according to conventions that are themselves part of a documentary reality. Hence, rather than ask whether an account is true, or whether it

¹⁴⁷ Bowen, “Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method,” 27.

¹⁴⁸ O’Leary, *The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project*, 272.

¹⁴⁹ Altheide et al. “Emergent Qualitative Document Analysis,” 127.

can be used as ‘valid’ evidence about a research setting, it is more fruitful to ask ourselves questions about the form and function of texts themselves.¹⁵⁰

In studying EAT, I judge all sorts of communications material generated by EAT and the central actors involved with establishing the initiative as highly relevant data. I thus started out by familiarizing myself with the EAT Foundation, the Stordalen Foundation, the Wellcome Trust, and the Stockholm Resilience Centre by studying their main communication channels. In doing so, I reviewed their websites, looking into among other things their annual reviews, press releases and published reports. Since the EAT Foundation has only published annual reviews from 2017 and 2018, I sought out the publicly available financial reviews of the Stordalen Foundation (now Strawberry Foundation), the EAT Foundation, and the EAT Stockholm Food Forum AS, from the Norwegian enterprise register the Brønnøysund Register Centre. Additionally, I looked at some of the central organizations’ social medial channels, especially EAT’s YouTube channel, as this contains video recordings from many of EAT’s events.

Further, I directed my attention to the founder and Executive Chair Gunhild Stordalen. As a prominent figure in the Norwegian media, she has shared her story and motivations for founding EAT on multiple occasions. The story about how EAT came about has thus been covered in both television documentaries, in-depth interviews, and podcasts. Stordalen also published a biography, “Det store bildet” in 2018, which has been a central source in my research.

In focusing my attention on the direct sources of EAT and the individuals and organizations involved, my analysis has a significant bias. Many of my main sources are the individuals own accounts and fall under narratives they have themselves created and put into words in biographies, documentaries, interviews and at their own webpages. These sources are still highly relevant, but I have been attentive to handle this data according to their inherent subjectivity. Whenever possible, I have triangulated the information with other sources. It is nevertheless necessary to read my analysis with this bias in mind.

¹⁵⁰ Atkinson and Coffey, “Analysing documentary realities,” 61.

In addition to reviewing sources that have been deliberately produced by the actors themselves, I searched for how these actors have been perceived and mentioned by others. Central in this regard have been articles and commentaries in online newspapers and magazines. To gather information, I used the news category in Google Search on specific topics I needed information on. I used keywords such as “Gunhild Stordalen criticism” and “EAT-*Lancet* criticism,” often combined with a relevant date, such as 2019 when gathering information about the launch of the EAT-*Lancet* Commission. Searches were done in both Norwegian and English. The data collection process was exploratory more than systematic, meaning my assembly of data has been shaped by both my personal choice of keywords, as well as the cookies. My analysis is therefore very much influenced by my positionality, a topic I reflect more on below.

In addition to informing my literature review, academic literature has been a significant source of data for my analysis. Since EAT is a science-based initiative, it found it appropriate to study the academic response to the initiative. To give an example, my analysis in the next chapter includes descriptions of EAT as an elitist and top-down initiative under corporate influence. These responses were collected from analyzing academic articles. To find relevant literature, I used Google Scholar and the University of Oslo’s library search. Most of the literature mentioning EAT has been generated in response to the highly cited EAT-*Lancet* Commission, and falls into the fields of nutrition, health, food, and environmental sciences. However, I found a few social and political science articles referring to the initiative. Most notably was the 64th issue of *Development* published in 2021, which discussed the circumstances and consequences of the United Nations Food Systems Summit. This literature was central in guiding the research process, as it directed me to pay closer attention to the policy environment EAT operates in.

EAT defines itself as a global, non-profit with the mission to catalyze a global food system transformation and has accordingly a very broad and cross-sectoral scope and target group. This has been challenging to navigate as a researcher. In my attempts to study the policy environment, I considered narrowing down the scope somehow, for instance by focusing on food security or sustainable diets. However, I find that EAT attempts to work beyond traditional sectors and disciplines and thus seeks to influence and collaborate with a broad range of actors. I therefore found it inappropriate to narrow

my scope. To understand the policy environment and the policy context within which EAT is embedded, I largely relied on academic literature. In one way, this can be seen as a weakness, as my analysis of the policy environment is more distanced from the topic I am studying than the rest of the analysis. This could perhaps have been mediated by expanding on my methods, for instance by doing observation and by planning for more interviews. On the other hand, I found it appropriate to rely on academic literature. It is an informative and reliable peer-reviewed source, and numerous researchers have summarized knowledge on the topic.

Key informant interviews

While I successfully sampled most of my information through open sources, I found it necessary to supplement with a few interviews. The document analysis has therefore been complemented by five key informant interviews. Key informants are here understood as “individuals whose role or experiences result in them having relevant information or knowledge they are willing to share with a researcher.”¹⁵¹ The use of key informants is particularly useful when answers to your research questions lie with selected individuals with specific knowledge.¹⁵² My motivations for doing interviews were twofold: First, to build contextual knowledge, and second, to gain more in-depth knowledge on certain topics.

I started out by reaching out to three individuals at the research center where I am studying, the Centre for Development and Environment at the University of Oslo, who had previously been professionally engaged with EAT. These individuals were identified and recruited through personal network and recommendations. The interview findings were used to build contextual knowledge and get a sense of where I was going. The conversations were also helpful in identifying suitable frameworks to analyze my data. Accordingly, the first three interviews were instrumental in the preliminary phase.

In the second round, I reached out to several central individuals still affiliated with EAT that I identified through document analysis. I reached out directly to four members of the Board of Trustees, one member of the Advisory Board, and one employee at the

¹⁵¹ O’Leary, *The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project*, 212.

¹⁵² O’Leary, *The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project*, 212.

EAT office in Oslo. I chose to not ask for an interview with Gunhild Stordalen as I found that I had saturated my sources on her perspectives at an early stage. As a public figure, she had already answered most of my interview questions through other sources, and I was confident I would not get other answers if I asked her myself. Unfortunately, only two out of the six individuals I reached out to answered my requests. All interview subjects can be deemed elite profiles that were difficult to reach personally. I found it challenging to reach them through personal network and was left with attempting to contact them directly. The two individuals who agreed to participate in an interview were the current Managing Director of EAT, Arne Haugen, and a current member of the Board of Trustees, Usman Mushtaq. Mushtaq was also identified through other sources as a central figure in establishing EAT back in 2013. The interviews gave me direct information about questions regarding EAT that I had not been able to locate elsewhere. They also supplemented my document analysis and allowed for triangulation of findings. Information from the interviews were fact checked and/or cross checked as far as possible to avoid recall bias.

All five interviews were conducted as semi-structured informal one-to-one interviews. I prepared individual interview guides on slightly different topics depending on their presumed knowledge and affiliation with EAT. The interviews were semi-structured with both a few open-ended questions and some closed, specific ones. This method let me keep track on time and make sure I was getting through the most important questions. At the same time, it also provided sufficient flexibility for the interviewee to keep conversation flowing in a relative informal tone and for me to adapt questions to whichever topic the respondent might bring up. Four of the interviews were conducted over Zoom and one in person. The digital interviews allowed for video recordings, which let me go back and take direct quotes and re-examine the conversation. I took hand-written notes during all five interviews, but was attentive and engaged in the conversation, doing my best to ask follow-up questions, and letting the conversation flow in an informal and friendly tone.

In some ways the limited number of interviews informing this thesis can be seen as a weakness. Speaking to more individuals with firsthand knowledge on the topic would probably have strengthened the database and given additional insights. Unfortunately, I was prevented from realizing more interviews due to practical impediments.

Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that the large array of publicly available sources was in itself a strong database for a case study of EAT. My main method was always intended to be document analysis, while the key informant interviews were a necessary supplement to gather necessary information from EAT that was not available elsewhere.

Positionality

The research design of this thesis prevents an entirely objective analysis. Qualitative research relies on the researchers' interpretations as much as the data. While I have attempted to let the data "speak for themselves," my researcher positionality has certainly guided both the selection of data as well as the interpretation. Managing this subjectivity is crucial to the credibility and trustworthiness of my findings.¹⁵³ In this section, I will thus reflect on the positionality deriving from my personal and academic background and how this has shaped the research process and result.

I have always been personally interested in understanding complex political issues from different perspectives and have therefore opted for interdisciplinary academic studies. My bachelor's degree is in International Studies with courses in history, political science, international law, and social economics. I learned about EAT years ago due to my personal interest in food, health, and sustainability and immediately felt drawn to their interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach. I was curious to learn more about what potential an initiative like EAT has in delivering innovative approaches to sustainable development. At the same time, I have followed the public debate around Gunhild Stordalen and her initiative. There are few private philanthropists in Norway compared to many other Western countries, and as wife of a public figure, Stordalen's philanthropic endeavors have often been met with criticism in the Norwegian public. This research project is thus shaped by both an inherent skepticism towards Stordalen and her claims to credibility and power as philanthropists, but also by a curious and positive attitude towards the initiative she has built.

My interest in EAT was further strengthened as I started my master's degree at the Centre for Development and Environment (SUM). Here, my initial interest in studying

¹⁵³ O'Leary, *The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project*, 59.

an initiative like EAT was backed by researchers working within the academic fields of global health, food, development, and sustainability. Several of the academic staff have personally met Gunhild Stordalen and are somewhat familiar with the environment EAT operates within. The center has also had a professional relation with EAT and some of the researchers have been invited to participate at the EAT Stockholm Food Forum. Naturally, there have been several informal conversations about my research. Since the individuals have met her personally, the informal conversations have often tended to emphasize Stordalen's personal character. These conversations have, although not part of my research design, inevitably shaped my perception of Stordalen and her initiative.

The described positionality has had the following implications for the analysis. First, I have deliberately avoided taking a normative position. If I had taken a stance on whether Stordalen and EAT brings a positive contribution to food systems governance, the analysis would have resulted in other perspectives. Second, my positionality as a Norwegian student at the Centre for Development and Environment has arguably produced a certain bias, and I have presumably missed out on opportunities for understanding my case from other points of view. Although research positionality can weaken the validity of research, I also see it as a strength. My interdisciplinary background has helped me navigate the broad, interdisciplinary field relevant for exploring EAT's role in global governance. My affiliation with SUM has also directed me to explore EAT within a relevant academic debate. It is nevertheless important to take this positionality into account. In recognizing my researcher bias, and being transparent in my methodological choices, I seek to enhance the validity of my case study.

Ethical considerations

According to O'Leary, a study is considered ethical if it "takes responsibility for integrity in the production of knowledge and ensures that the mental, emotional and physical welfare of respondents is protected."¹⁵⁴ Throughout the research process, I have been careful to ensure that necessary ethical standards for academic research has

¹⁵⁴ O'Leary, *The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project*, 123.

been met. My research project has clearance from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). As the main subject of research, the EAT administration was informed about the project. Further, all informants received an information letter containing relevant information about what participation in the research project would entail. All participants consented to being interviewed, and if I recorded the conversation, I explicitly asked for approval in advance.

In qualitative research, it is crucial for participants to have confidence that the information they share with the researcher will remain confidential. Participants should also have the autonomy to decide to what degree they want to be identified in the study.¹⁵⁵ The identities of three out of the five informants remains confidential. This is because of two reasons. Although the respondents consented to being identified, I suggested before we started the interview that they could remain anonymous. This was because I wanted them to speak freely about their opinions and experiences with EAT. Second, after analyzing the data I found it necessary to be open about their affiliation with my own research center, but I did not find it relevant to identify their name and position. With the two informants from EAT on the other hand, I found it relevant to identify their name, responsibility, and position in EAT. Both consented to being identified, and they were offered the opportunity to explicitly approve quotations.

All data, including the interview recordings, have been securely managed and stored on the University of Oslo server. I have strived to not identify the anonymous persons in my handmade notes.

Lastly, I have been attentive to not distort any meaning that could potentially get lost in the translation process. All five interviews were conducted in Norwegian. When translating, I took great care to accurately convey the original meaning to the best of my abilities. I also made sure to present participants' perspectives in a respectful manner.

¹⁵⁵ Lichtman, "Ethical issues in qualitative research."

5. The EAT Foundation

Before analyzing factors that may have enabled EAT to become an influential actor, this chapter lays out some background to what kind of initiative EAT is and how and why it was established.

The EAT Foundation is the brainchild of the Norwegian philanthropist and medical doctor Gunhild Stordalen. Stordalen became a public figure in Norway as the model girlfriend of Petter Stordalen, a well-known hotel owner and billionaire, also described as the “flashiest Scandinavian on the Planet”.¹⁵⁶ While the couple frequented the media for their extravagant lifestyle and attendance at celebrity parties, Gunhild Stordalen was eager to demonstrate that she was more interested in climate change than designer bags. According to herself, she felt conflicted about being her extravagant husband’s “arm candy” and her new lifestyle with a large personal environmental footprint.¹⁵⁷ When the couple got married in 2010, she was gifted the Stordalen Foundation (now Strawberry Foundation) and got engaged in philanthropic work.

Stordalen got the idea of EAT when she was researching how to advise the board of her husband’s hotel company on sustainability. She found out that food and beverages constituted as much as 70% of the environmental footprint of an average hotel.¹⁵⁸ She had never thought of food as such a large driver of environmental degradation before and started looking for research on what food the hotels could serve to decrease the environmental footprint. As a medical doctor, Stordalen was also concerned about the health effects of food and believed there was a massive health potential in eating healthily. But what kind of food could be considered both healthy and sustainable? The answer to her question turned out to be more complicated than she expected. Stordalen was surprised to find that few people were researching the interlinkages of the issues of food, health, and sustainability. She found lots of research on climate-smart agriculture, on healthy diets, and on the CO₂ emissions of different foods, but little research putting

¹⁵⁶ Elliott, “Meet Petter Stordalen, Norway’s Ferrari-Driving Green Avenger.”

¹⁵⁷ Jørgensen, “Gunhild Stordalen: - Lei meg av terningkastene.”

¹⁵⁸ Stordalen, “Det store bildet,” 93-94.

it all together. As she said it in an interview: “I realized, that if I struggled to identify clear guidelines for our hotels and restaurants in Scandinavia, how could world leaders develop efficient, integrated policies to enhance food security?”¹⁵⁹

Stordalen quickly realized she had stumbled upon a knowledge gap.¹⁶⁰ Although many were aware of the potential in the health, sustainability and food nexus, there was little interdisciplinary research on the topic, and there was no organized arena where scientists, politicians, civil society, and business leaders could meet and discuss how food could be the solution to a range of sustainability issues. What started as planning for a breakfast seminar on the topic quickly turned out to be something much bigger. Like the World Economic Forum was to economy, Stordalen was convinced the world needed a meeting for food.¹⁶¹ And as she had the time and resources, she got motivated to do something about it. As she once said it: “EAT came into being, not because I can do something others can't, but because I had the opportunity.”¹⁶²

One of the first things Stordalen did was to reach out to the one man she knew before with the most knowledge on the topic, Professor Johan Rockström.¹⁶³ Rockström is Professor in environmental science and founder and former Executive Director of Stockholm Resilience Centre (SRC). He is renowned for developing the groundbreaking framework on Planetary Boundaries for Human Development, first published in 2009, which profoundly influenced perceptions of the human impact on climate and nature. His work on planetary boundaries had demonstrated that food was one of the largest drivers of environmental change, but also far from being addressed as so politically and scientifically. Rockström has referred to Gunhild Stordalen reaching out as a “real strike of luck from above”.¹⁶⁴ A partnership with the Stordalen Foundation offered a funding opportunity for more research on the topic. But mostly, Rockström was motivated by the potential of getting food right. He believed there was a

¹⁵⁹ Turow-Paul, “Why Gunhild Stordalen Believes Food Entrepreneurs Will Change The World.”

¹⁶⁰ Stordalen, “Det store bildet,” 98.

¹⁶¹ Stordalen, “Det store bildet,” 98.

¹⁶² Thune, “Gunhild Stordalen (36) er kåret til Årets kvinne.”

¹⁶³ Stordalen, “Det store bildet,” 108.

¹⁶⁴ EAT on YouTube, “Johan Rockström,” 9:58-10:09.

“tremendous untapped potential” in exploring the interface of food, sustainability, and health across science, business, and policy.¹⁶⁵

Together, Stordalen and Rockström co-founded the EAT Initiative. The overall objective was to:

...expand the interdisciplinary scientific knowledge platform on the interconnections between food, health and environmental sustainability, spur innovation along the food value chain, facilitate development of evidence-based policies as well as strategies to induce behavioral change at a population level towards healthier and more sustainable food.¹⁶⁶

Rockström soon chaired an interdisciplinary Advisory Board of experts from both policy, science, and business. Stordalen gathered a small team, mainly of people from the Norwegian television industry, which would work together with the Stockholm Resilience Centre to plan for a conference.¹⁶⁷ The goal was to gather leading actors across science, policy and business to discuss how to sustainably feed a healthy world population.¹⁶⁸ They wanted to address a politically and academically challenging issue in an entertaining and interesting way.¹⁶⁹

In May 2014, 400 participants from 28 countries gathered in Stockholm for the first EAT Stockholm Food Forum.¹⁷⁰ The conference had big headliners such as Bill Clinton and Prince Charles, and the participants list included international renowned experts such as Tim Lang, Walter Willett, and Carlos Monteiro. According to the editors of the journal *World Nutrition*, the forum exceeded expectations and was described as “... a vivid and memorable meeting with world-class gripping scenario, graphics, and projection”.¹⁷¹ Stordalen also characterized the first forum as “a gigantic success,” but she also acknowledged the validity of the criticism the event generated. First, that the forum had been too elitist, and second, that there should have been more focus on

¹⁶⁵ EAT on YouTube, “Johan Rockström,” 11:24-11:27.

¹⁶⁶ Stordalenfoundation.no.

¹⁶⁷ Stordalen, “Det store bildet.”

¹⁶⁸ Eatforum.org, “The Origins of EAT”.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Usman Mushtaq, January 11, 2023.

¹⁷⁰ Stordalen, “Det store bildet,” 116.

¹⁷¹ Cogill, “The EAT Forum. Public Health Nutrition,” 519-520.

results.¹⁷² Nevertheless, EAT had successfully brought together a range of high-level actors for a multi-stakeholder debate about the potential of addressing health and sustainability issues combined through a food systems lens.

Since then, EAT has worked to advance the academic and political discussion on food systems transformation. The central activity has up until the Covid-19 pandemic been the annual EAT Stockholm Food Forum, a multi-stakeholder conference co-hosted by the Swedish Government.¹⁷³ In 2017, EAT also convened a forum in Jakarta, the EAT Pacific Food Forum, co-hosted by the Ministry of Health in Indonesia.¹⁷⁴ Apart from its role as a convener and facilitator of discussions, one of the central strategic goals of EAT has been to “generate independent, trusted knowledge to inform change-makers’ decisions.”¹⁷⁵ EAT-*Lancet* Commission has been central in this regard. The Commission brought together 19 Commissioners and 18 co-authors from 16 countries, experts from various fields such as environmental sustainability, nutrition, and political science, to answer the fundamentally important question: How can we healthily feed 10 billion people within planetary boundaries in 2050?¹⁷⁶ The work was led by Professor Walter Willett and Professor Johan Rockström. The EAT-*Lancet* report released in January 2019 concluded that it is indeed possible to feed a growing population healthy and sustainable food, but massive shifts must take place within our food systems. The Commission suggested a universal reference diet to guide new healthy sustainable diets to nurture human health and support environmental sustainability.¹⁷⁷

The EAT-*Lancet* Commission was central in putting EAT on the map and at the front of debates about sustainable diets. According to EAT, the report was downloaded from *the Lancet*’s website over 28,000 times in the first six months, and the summary report was accessed 100,000 times through EAT’s website.¹⁷⁸ They considered this to be exceptional numbers for a *Lancet* Commission. According to Altmetric, a program for measuring the outreach of scientific research, the EAT-*Lancet* report was among the

¹⁷² Stordalen, “Det store bildet,” 174.

¹⁷³ Eatforum.org, “Sweden and EAT to co-host the 2018 EAT Stockholm Food Forum.”

¹⁷⁴ Eatforum.org, “EAT Asia-Pacific Food Forum 2017.”

¹⁷⁵ Eatforum.org, “EAT Annual Review 2018,” 14.

¹⁷⁶ Rockström et al. “Acting in the Anthropocene.”

¹⁷⁷ Willett et al., “Food in the Anthropocene.”

¹⁷⁸ Eatforum.org, “Can a Scientific Commission Change the World?”

most discussed works published in 2019, ranking number 18 out of the top 100 in their database of 2.7 million outputs.¹⁷⁹ The report is also measured to be among the top 5% of all research output in the database.¹⁸⁰ The *EAT-Lancet* report is continuously debated: Google Scholar measure close to 6500 citations to date.¹⁸¹ The report has also been referred to in several policy papers, such as reports from UN organizations, the European Commission, and the Government of Norway. It has also been mentioned in reports from organizations such as the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).¹⁸²

Additionally, EAT has aspired to engage stakeholders and accelerate impact through translating knowledge into action.¹⁸³ Collaboration has taken place through a broad range of joint projects and initiatives. One example is the partnership with C40, a network of mayors working together to deliver climate action in their cities. EAT and the C40 network collaborate on implementing changes in food consumption and production in cities, exchanging knowledge and experiences on topics such as urban agriculture and reduction of food waste.¹⁸⁴ A similar example is the FReSH Initiative, a collaboration with the World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD), aiming at developing business solutions to food systems transformation.¹⁸⁵

EAT's strategy of convening stakeholders from science, business, and policy to look at the interlinkages of food, health, and sustainability, has been described as a "double triple helix."¹⁸⁶ This is a reference to the term "triple helix", a system of innovation across industry, policy and science first theorized by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff.¹⁸⁷ According to EAT, this dynamic creates a three-way interaction across knowledge, engagement, and action:

¹⁷⁹ Altmetric.com, "The 2019 Altmetric Top 100."

¹⁸⁰ Altmetric, "Overview of attention for article published in The Lancet, February 2019."

¹⁸¹ Scholar.google.com, citations for "Food in the Anthropocene."

¹⁸² Altmetric, "Overview of attention for article published in The Lancet, February 2019 - Policy documents."

¹⁸³ Eatforum.org, "Eat Annual Review 2018," 15.

¹⁸⁴ Eatforum.org, "EAT-C40."

¹⁸⁵ Wbcds.org, "EAT and WBCSD take action to transform the global food system."

¹⁸⁶ Rockstrom, "How to eat for health and for a healthy planet."

¹⁸⁷ Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff, "The Triple Helix -- University-Industry-Government Relations."

The generation of new knowledge provides direction and an evidence base for change. Creative engagement with partners across business, policy and science amplifies messages and spurs action for change. Partnerships inspired through engagement and informed by knowledge enabled actions leading to change and impact at scale.¹⁸⁸

This model is referred to as EAT’s framework for change (see figure 3).

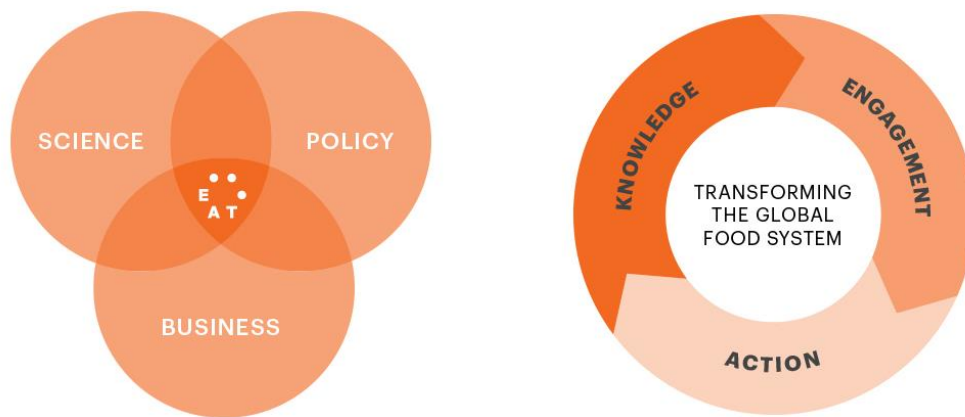


Figure 3: EAT’s visualization of their approach to food system transformation and framework for change.¹⁸⁹

Due to its interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral strategy and organizational structure, EAT is an interesting case to explore non-state actors’ role in global governance. How does such an actor operate in practice? What potential does it hold in bridging the gap between knowledge and action on a highly contested and challenging issue? In what ways may EAT’s multi-stakeholder identity and framework for change have facilitated an influential position in the sustainable food systems agenda? In the following analysis of EAT’s emergence and effectiveness, we take a closer look at these questions.

¹⁸⁸ Eatforum.org, “How we work.”

¹⁸⁹ Eatforum.org, “How we work.”

6. Factors explaining emergence and effectiveness

In this chapter, I analyze EAT's emergence and effectiveness through the framework developed by Shiffman and colleagues. I start by discussing network and actor features, before reflecting on characteristics of the issue EAT addresses. Finally, we take a closer look at how characteristics of the policy environment bring important perspectives to the research question.

Network and actor features

Networks are loose entities of individuals and organizations linked by a shared concern. When analyzing a network, it is essential to study the actors involved and their role in developing the initiative. Who are the people behind EAT, and what resources and capabilities did they bring to the initiative? How did they organize and work together to develop EAT? In this section, I take a closer look at EAT's leadership and governance form, the composition of actors and the different resources they bring, and what framing strategies EAT has adopted. The analysis demonstrates that EAT is a network of particularly resourceful and well-connected individuals and organizations that found effective ways of working together.

Leadership

The importance of effective leaders in organizational effectiveness is well documented by public policy and management scholars.¹⁹⁰ Great leadership is characterized by qualities such as persistence, coalition-building skills, communicative skills, credibility, and talent. Effective leaders are likeable, trustworthy, and good at creating clarity around complex matters. Shiffman et al. argue that a network is more likely to emerge and be effective if capable, well-connected and widely respected champions are available to lead the cause. Indeed, such champions have been central to the emergence of EAT as a policy actor.

¹⁹⁰ Shiffman et al. "A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks," 17.

EAT has had two central leaders from the very start, the two co-founders Gunhild Stordalen and Johan Rockström. As Executive Chair and leader of the Advisory Board, they have both played crucial roles in establishing and developing EAT as a science-based platform for food systems transformation. During the first couple of years, Gunhild managed the initiative, while the Advisory Board led by Rockström was central in developing strategies and leading the way forward. When the EAT Foundation was founded, a Board of Trustees was established to oversee budgets and strategies, while the Advisory Board got a more subsidiary function. Stordalen took on the role as Executive Chair, while a CEO was hired to manage the organization.

Although the CEO has had essential roles in managing the initiative, it is Stordalen who is the main leader behind EAT. She was, in many ways, an unlikely leader of a global multi-stakeholder platform for food systems transformation. When Stordalen started EAT, she was working as a medical doctor and leading the philanthropic activities of the Stordalen Foundation. She had three years of experience from the philanthropic world working with climate change mitigation, but she had no political experience. Personally, she has never had any interest in food or cooking, largely relying on takeaway food and eating out.¹⁹¹ The first person Stordalen reached out to when starting to build up EAT, at that time CEO of the production company Warner Bros Norway Odd Arvid Strømstad, put it frankly in their first meeting:

If we're being completely honest with each other, I'm guessing you never cook, and now you're going to sort of go out and tell people what to eat? No, sorry. That won't work. People aren't going to buy it, I am afraid they're going to think this is a hobby project of a billionaire's wife.¹⁹²

Stordalen's first steps of climate activism in the Norwegian public were met with mockery and skepticisms. People found it provocative that she would tell people to stop driving motorized vehicles while she would cruise around in her expensive electric car and fly her husband's company's private jet.¹⁹³ Stordalen quickly realized what her wealthy celebrity lifestyle damaged her image as an environmental activist. When

¹⁹¹ Stordalen, "Det store bildet," 100.

¹⁹² Stordalen, "Det store bildet," 99-100.

¹⁹³ Stordalen, "Det store bildet," 93; Byggeindustrien, "Miljø-Stordalen kjøper eget fly."

commenting on the later divorce from her husband in an interview in 2019, she said EAT would never have been possible without his generous support, but that it would become easier for her to convey a credible message from now on.¹⁹⁴ Having a PhD in medicine certainly gives Stordalen some credibility. But as a well-educated, wealthy, and good-looking celebrity, Stordalen does not represent the most people in many ways. Being a white philanthropist from the Global North with little interest in food and no experience with agriculture certainly does not help her image when engaging in a global discussion on food and agriculture. Why should she, of all people, set the agenda in global forums and debates around food?

Although Stordalen might fall short on credibility and legitimacy, she has other qualities that make her an effective leader for a network like EAT. The same reasons why she struggled with credibility provided her with considerable amounts of structural and instrumental power. Her marriage to Petter Stordalen put her in the spotlight with a microphone in her hand. Although the attention she got in the beginning was more about her appearance than her values, she found herself in an advantageous position. As a leader of a wealthy charity, she got a seat at the table in discussions on climate change and environmental sustainability and took a seat as board member at environmental organizations such as the European Climate Foundation and the Zero Emission Resource Organization (ZERO). In her new role as philanthropist, she developed a high-level personal network among climate change activists and a name people became familiar with. In 2012 the Stordalen couple was invited to an excursion to Antarctica with Al Gore, along with 100+ leading scientists, politicians, and environmental activists.¹⁹⁵ Norwegian tabloids soon started referring to the couple as the Norwegian equivalent to Bill and Melinda Gates.¹⁹⁶

Stordalen also seems to have some personal characteristics that make her a good leader, among these a strong personal motivation. According to herself, she has had a passion for animal welfare and environmental activism since childhood, and a strong wish to be

¹⁹⁴ Krantz and Magnus, "Gunhild Stordalen tildelt prestisjetung pris og snakker ut om bruddet."

¹⁹⁵ Climateschangenews.com, "Branson and Gore send messages from Antarctica trip"; Vermes, "Klimakampen: Stordalen på Antarktistur med Al Gore."

¹⁹⁶ Tvare, "Norges svar på Bill og Melinda."

of service and work with something meaningful.¹⁹⁷ As she got married to Petter Stordalen, she found herself in a privileged position where she felt like she could do much more as a philanthropist than in her job as a medical doctor.¹⁹⁸ Although plenty of her engagement in philanthropy can be explained by her genuine concerns on climate change, it was also largely driven by guilt. In her book Stordalen argues she has a distinctive responsibility and that she needed to “pay a debt”.¹⁹⁹ While EAT grew bigger, her engagement turned out to be not only a job, but the cause that she lived for. Stordalen’s motivation increased further when she was diagnosed with a severe illness in 2014. Faced with a potentially deadly disease, she realized she had a limited period of time to make an impact. This made her work even harder. To focus on EAT helped her believe her life was worth fighting for. As she put it in her biography: “Where others who received the death sentence focused on their children, I did the same. My baby was EAT.”²⁰⁰

Apart from being extremely hard-working, Stordalen comes off as very strong-willed and persuasive. According to herself, she was taught from a young age that she could do whatever she put her mind to if only she worked hard enough.²⁰¹ With big aspirations, big confidence and time and money to go “all in,” Stordalen entered the food systems agenda with serious plans. She tirelessly reached out to influential, busy people and would not rest until she got hold of them. Many were skeptical. In Norway, some felt conflicted about being associated with the Stordalen couple.²⁰² But the number of people who got on board with the project within the first year, and the level of prestige and expertise they had, demonstrates Stordalen’s capacity and ability to connect with and persuade people. Gunhild Stordalen is often described as relentless, charismatic, and good at convincing people.²⁰³ When asked how she has been so successful in convincing people, Stordalen admits that she has a strong ability to connect with people,

¹⁹⁷ NRK, “Datoen – Gunhild Stordalen.”

¹⁹⁸ Stordalen, “Det store bildet,” 90.

¹⁹⁹ Stordalen, “Det store bildet,” 249-250.

²⁰⁰ Stordalen, “Det store bildet,” 195.

²⁰¹ Stordalen, “Det store bildet,” 20.

²⁰² Interview with informant 2, January 8, 2021; Stordalen, “Det store bildet,” 112.

²⁰³ TV2, “Gunhilds kamp”; Aftenposten, “Gunhild Stordalen: – Du må huske at jeg kom inn i en ny verden”; Anon, “Food systems. The Eat Forum,” 416.

to bring people together, and create a feeling of being on a mission together.²⁰⁴ Such skills are fundamental in building a cross-sectoral coalition like EAT.

Stordalen knew from the start that her legitimacy to reform the global health system was questionable. That is why she early on reached out to, in her words, the “academic superstar,” Johan Rockström.²⁰⁵ Although Rockström has never been employed at EAT, his leadership as co-founder, member of the Board of Trustees and leader of the Advisory Board has been decisive for the emergence and effectiveness of EAT. Rockström is among the world’s most renowned scientists on sustainability issues and provides loads of credibility and legitimacy to the initiative. According to Clarivate Analytics, he is ranked as one of the most influential and cited scientists in the world.²⁰⁶ Rockström is also known as an extremely good communicator. His research has been broadcast widely through three popular TED talks and the Netflix documentary *Breaking Boundaries* featuring the famous broadcaster and conservationist David Attenborough. In a passionate, but humble way, he explains complex issues in a simple manner.

Johan Rockström and his colleagues at Stockholm Resilience Centre can be regarded as thought-leaders on Earth systems and sustainability sciences. The Planetary Boundaries Framework provided a scientific baseline for further interdisciplinary research on sustainable development. It also provided decision-makers with scientific evidence to make more informed decisions on environmental issues. Consequently, Rockström frequently acts as advisor to high-level forums such as the General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGA), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conferences (UNFCCC), and the World Economic Forum (WEF).²⁰⁷ The Stockholm Resilience Centre is also known to engage in normative research. Several researchers can be said to work in the policy/action interface, engaging in partnerships with business and policy.²⁰⁸ According to the Chair of the Board at the research center in 2017, SRC does sustainability research in innovative ways:

²⁰⁴ Banik, “Transforming our global food system,” 49:50.

²⁰⁵ Stordalen, “Det store bildet,” 108.

²⁰⁶ Clarivate.com, “Highly Cited Researchers.”

²⁰⁷ Pik-potsdam.de, “Prof. Dr. Johan Rockström.”

²⁰⁸ Stockholmresilience.org, “Annual Report 2012.”

One of the things which separates the SRC from similar research organisations is its highly collaborative and creative culture. It is a lively, open environment, as playful as it is hardworking. And this was done with deliberate intent. From the earliest days SRC research was theme based as opposed to disciplinary based, and staff were recruited from both the social and the natural sciences.²⁰⁹

This normative, theme-based approach is clearly visible in EAT, demonstrating the importance of Rockström and Stockholm Resilience Centre's role in developing the initiative.

The fact that EAT was established by a well-known and respected scientist like Rockström made other scientists feel safe getting involved. As one of the informants put it, people saw potential in EAT and Gunhild Stordalen because: "She has money, she is driven, and she has Rockström".²¹⁰ As leader of the Advisory Board, Rockström led the strategic discussions on how the science-based platform could best advance a food systems transformation and provided a strong, scientific foundation for EAT's activities. In many ways, he has been just as essential to the emergence and effectiveness of EAT as Stordalen. The two leaders enter different, complementary roles. While Stordalen leads the organizational and foundation work as Executive Chair, Rockström leads the scientific work as Chair of the Advisory Board. Stordalen brings money and resources, publicity, a network within philanthropism and business and a strong capacity to bring people together. Rockström brings prestige, legitimacy, and credibility by being a top scientist with an excellent network both from within and outside of academic circles. They both come out as strong leaders with good communications skills and lots of drive and passion for what they do. One could also say they appeal to different target groups; while Stordalen can make the message interesting to the media and a larger public, even "sexy" or provocative, Rockström comes off as the down to earth, evidence-based, and trustworthy scientist. Together, they personalize the essence of what EAT aspires to be: a well-balanced cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary platform for change.

²⁰⁹ Stockholmresilience.org, "SRC Decennial Report 2007-2017," 6.

²¹⁰ Interview with informant 2, January 8, 2021.

Governance

Shiffman and colleagues posit that networks are more likely to be effective if they have appropriate governing structures capable of facilitating collective action and resolving disputes. In the case of EAT, the initiative found appropriate governance structures that changed over time. These governance structures give important explanations to the success of EAT.

Before 2016, EAT was managed quite loosely as an initiative in the Stordalen Foundation portfolio, at that time a rather newly established philanthropy. There are a limited number of reports of their activities available publicly, but the Board of 2011-2014 consisted of the Stordalen couple themselves along with two of Petter Stordalen's long time business partners.²¹¹ EAT was led by Gunhild Stordalen herself, Chair of the Board of the Stordalen Foundation. Additionally, the Advisory Board led by Rockström played a central role in guiding and developing the initiative.²¹² The Advisory Board represented policy, science, and business, and with expertise within both health, food, and environment (see figure 2).

²¹¹ Information accessed through the Norwegian enterprise register the Brønnøysund Register Centre.

²¹² Interview with Usman Mushtaq, January 11, 2023.

Advisory Board



Figure 2: EAT’s Advisory Board 2014.²¹³

According to Usman Mushtaq, a current member of EAT’s Board of Trustees who was engaged in the initiative from the start, EAT was not much more than a network of a few handpicked people the first year.²¹⁴ The focus was on how they could best advance a conversation around food, health, and sustainability across sectors. The main goal was to arrange a high-level conference in Stockholm, but there were also discussions on how to advance this agenda academically through interdisciplinary research. Apart from the Advisory Board, there were only a handful of people working on the initiative. The flat, non-hierarchical structure of the EAT network was highly beneficial in the initiative’s early years.²¹⁵ But as EAT grew rapidly into a global initiative, steps had to be taken to establish a professional organization. In 2015, a new Board of Trustees took shape, led by Gunhild Stordalen as Executive Chair. EAT also got its first CEO, Jonathan

²¹³ Power Point slide dated January 7, 2014. Shared with me by Arne Haugen via email on April 12, 2023.

²¹⁴ Interview with Usman Mushtaq, January 11, 2023.

²¹⁵ Stordalen, “Det store bildet,” 219.

Farnell.²¹⁶ And, most notably, funds were secured beyond the personal engagement from Stordalen and her husband's foundation. The Wellcome Trust, one of the wealthiest charitable foundations in the world, entered as main sponsor with 3 million pounds.²¹⁷ This was a large upgrade. Being affiliated with the Wellcome Trust, a main health research funder, was prestigious for EAT and a recognition of the work they had done.²¹⁸

In March 2016, the Stordalen Foundation, Stockholm Resilience Centre and the Wellcome Trust launched the EAT Foundation. Stordalen Foundation and Wellcome Trust were to annually invest 3 million pounds each, whereas Stockholm Resilience Centre would oversee the coordination of the research activities.²¹⁹ The EAT Foundation has a more clearly defined governing structure than the EAT Initiative. The Advisory Board does still play an important role in the organization but has no responsibility other than providing strategic direction.²²⁰ The new Board of Trustees governs and manages EAT and bears the ultimate responsibility for the initiative. The Board meets formally four times a year and fulfill their responsibility through a stewardship role, delegating EAT's day-to-day management to a leadership team and the CEO.²²¹

The EAT Foundation's formal organizational structure gives the impression of a tightly organized initiative. However, this might not capture the whole picture. One thing is what the EAT organization is doing, another is what people and initiatives that are affiliated with EAT are doing. A considerable amount of EAT's accomplishments can be understood as driven forward by the larger network, in projects, by partners, at forums and meetings, in academic discussions etc. The most prominent example is the Food Systems Dialogues, a concept developed by EAT but administered and implemented as a project by the broader EAT network. Consequently, EAT can be said to have a more network based governing structure that lets it draw upon a broader coalition to raise attention to the cause.

²¹⁶ NTB, "Gunhild Stordalen ansetter etterfølger i EAT."

²¹⁷ Stordalen, "Det store bildet," 220.

²¹⁸ EAT on YouTube, "Prof. Johan Rockström," 7:55-8:30; Stordalen, "Det store bildet," 219.

²¹⁹ Stockholmresilience.org, "Introducing the EAT Foundation."

²²⁰ Interview with Arne Haugen, December 20, 2022.

²²¹ Ensango.un.org, "EAT Foundation."

As a loosely organized network, it is valuable to investigate how EAT manages the network activities through its partnerships and projects. EAT's partnership structure is vaguely defined and has changed over time. On their current web pages, EAT makes a separation between Core Partners, Strategic Partners, Knowledge Partners, Other Partners, and Other Allies.²²² The difference between these is not clear. According to CEO of EAT Arne Haugen, EAT has partnerships both with and without funding involved. Most partnerships are linked to specific projects, such as sponsoring events or participating in a research project. Some partnerships are purely sponsorships, such as the core funding EAT receives from the Stordalen Foundation. Others involve an exchange of both knowledge, network, and funding, such as EAT's partnership with the Norwegian enterprise Bama. The various partnerships differ in how they are managed. While some have formal contracts, many are simply memorandums of understanding.²²³

Some partnerships that appear on paper do not operate in practice. For example, the Centre for Development and Environment at the University of Oslo is listed as an ally at EAT's web pages on partnerships. However, there is no formal partnership agreement between the two. The research center, which has a small research staff working with food and health, had several meetings with EAT and the Stockholm Resilience Centre to find ways to collaborate with each other. Researchers from the center participated at the first EAT Forums and were invited to join a research project. In the end, the partnership did not result in anything concrete, and it was never clear to the University of Oslo what their role would be.²²⁴ This way of working demonstrates a loose partnership model. The EAT Administration is taking a leading role in convening people, leading projects forward and building the community, but the network is not strongly administered and connected. According to member of the Board of Trustees Usman Mushtaq, EAT could have been much bigger if the goal had been to grow the organization. But instead, the focus was on advancing the discussion in the best way possible:

²²² Eatforum.org, "Partnerships."

²²³ Interview with Arne Haugen, December 12, 2022.

²²⁴ Interview with informant 2, January 8, 2021.

We have had an unbelievably open approach to how we work with people. Some have benefited from that, others have not. But I believe this approach has been an important part of EAT's success. That we were oriented towards the cause, not the organization.²²⁵

EAT may have benefited from being a small, personal initiative. A few people working together is an agile and flexible organization. Such a governance form is a stark contrast to bigger institutions set up to address food issues. Many would argue in favor of the potential of small innovative organizations like EAT, such as EAT's Director of Science Translation Brent Loken, who believes that:

...if we stand any chance of achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement it will be because of fast moving organizations like EAT that disrupt the status quo and show the world a better way forward.²²⁶

Being a small organization with non-hierarchical structure and overlapping roles was key to its fast growth. But it was also challenging at times.²²⁷ Being a "movement" with a start-up spirit can be appealing to many. It attracts collaboration and opportunities, innovation, and learning. But the undefined partnerships can to others be challenging and too shallow. What does it really mean to be affiliated with EAT? What does a partnership entail? To keep things undefined means all actors can see some sort of benefit from or appeal in cooperating with them, or at least to believe in their message. To keep it tight means more liability, but less flexibility.

EAT is an organization working in the intersection of sectors that can be identified as both a network, a foundation, a forum, and a multi-stakeholder partnership. Such a loose entity must also be difficult to govern. To work at the intersection of topics and sectors and entities is a challenging task, and so must governing such an initiative be. The period is too short to evaluate the effectiveness, but the fact that EAT is still a relevant actor points to the fact that the evolving governance form can be seen as successful. The "looseness" may both hinder and help emergence and effectiveness. One could argue that EAT's emergence benefited from being loosely organized

²²⁵ Interview with Usman Mushtaq, January 11, 2023.

²²⁶ Eatforum.org, "Dr. Brent Loken PhD."

²²⁷ Stordalen, "Det store bildet," 219.

initially, but the gradual transition to a more tightly organized entity has secured further effectiveness. Throughout, EAT's mission has been advanced, not hampered by a central administration that has managed to lead things forward without holding on too tightly. This must be seen as a considerable factor in EAT's success.

Composition of actors

Shiffman and colleagues hypothesize that networks that link diverse actors are more likely to generate creative solutions to problems but also to be hampered by disagreements.²²⁸ Since the beginning EAT has been an elite initiative made up of powerful actors. They were renowned scientists, top politicians, wealthy philanthropists, and editors of prestigious journals. We know global networks often play influential roles in shaping the agenda, and the high-level group of actors constituting the EAT network can be seen as a force like no other. It is a broad movement with diverse groups of actors bringing different perspectives and resources.

First, EAT is backed up by two wealthy foundations with considerable resources. Petter Stordalen is a USD billionaire, listed as the 10th richest Norwegian in 2013.²²⁹ He placed a few hundred thousand GBP in the Stordalen Foundation, enough to get the EAT initiative up and running. Consultants with expertise in communication, events and strategy were hired to develop the network. Generous amounts were spent on the first EAT Stockholm Food Forum to make it a high-level, prestigious academic conference. It clearly stood out compared to other academic conferences in terms of budgets, attendance of celebrities, and a highly professional production with appealing sound and visuals. The producers behind were among the most experienced in Norway, having produced big shows like the Nobel Peace Prize concert and the international Eurovision finale.²³⁰ The Stordalen Foundation also spent considerable amounts of money on speakers, as much as 500 000 USD on Bill Clinton as keynote speaker in 2014.²³¹ According to EAT, this investment turned out to be decisive for getting the

²²⁸ Shiffman et al., "A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks."

²²⁹ Hanstad, "Dette er Norges rikeste i 2013."

²³⁰ Stordalen, "Det store bildet," 99.

²³¹ Hagan, "Bill Clinton fikk 3,5 millioner for denne timeslange talen."

attention they wanted.²³² Large conference budgets were essential in building the network and to make a name of itself.

Finances were further secured when the Wellcome Trust entered as main sponsor in 2015. The two charities agreed on funding EAT with 3 million GBP each, providing a strong foundation for further operation.²³³ While the Stordalen Foundation is a relatively newly established charity with modest budgets, the Wellcome Trust is a longstanding, well-reputed charity, and among the wealthiest non-profit foundations in the world.²³⁴ The Wellcome Trust's involvement gave prestige and credibility to the initiative. The funding ensured that the organization could grow and professionalize. It also provided essential funding for projects like the EAT-*Lancet* Commission. Compared to most research projects, the Commission was supported by massive communications effort with several launches around the world. Strong funding made it possible to spend considerable amounts of time and money on key stakeholder engagement, media relations, and other ways of amplifying its reach and impact. The importance of being a financially strong science-based initiative thus cannot be underestimated.

As a science-based platform, the third founding partner Stockholm Resilience Centre plays an indispensable role for EAT. The center functions as secretariat for all research activities, ensuring that EAT's undertakings are in line with academic standards. It brings knowledge, research capacity, and a large academic network. The center is considered to be among the world's leading research centers on environmental sustainability and resilience science.²³⁵ Since expertise and research are important in claims to power, being associated with this actor gave EAT more credibility compared to other actors in the food systems agenda.

EAT's science-based credibility is further strengthened by its close affiliation with the medical journal *the Lancet*. Editor in Chief Richard Horton has been member of EAT's Advisory Board since the beginning and has had prominent roles at several of EAT's

²³² Haugan, "Bill Clinton fikk 3,5 millioner for denne timeslange talen."

²³³ Stordalen, "Det store bildet," 220.

²³⁴ The Lancet, "The Wellcome Trust."

²³⁵ Stockholmresilience.org, "Stockholm University fifth in the world in Environmental Science."

forums and events. By providing peer reviewed research on a broad variety of health topics, the journal is regarded as a credible and reliable source of knowledge in the field of global health. While its legitimacy has been contested,²³⁶ *the Lancet's* is one of the most powerful actors in global health politics. Their commissions are known to influence agendas quite effectively.²³⁷ Apart from the EAT Stockholm Food Forum, EAT is known to most because of the EAT-*Lancet* Commission on healthy diets from sustainable food systems. By making a name for itself alongside one of the most prestigious medical journals, EAT gets considerable credibility.

The corporate sector is also represented in the EAT network. Besides funding the initiative and being represented in both the Board of Trustees and the Advisory Board, private corporations take part in the broader network activities by participating in meetings, forums, and projects. The business sector can bring important perspectives to the discussion, as well as promoting innovation and efficiency.²³⁸ Apart from financial power, they also bring considerable network and structural power. This is perhaps most evident in EAT's close relations with the World Economic Forum, which is represented in both the Board of Trustees and the Advisory Board. The World Economic Forum's influence in global food politics was well demonstrated with their success in shaping the agenda of the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021. Close affiliation with the private sector may also damage EAT's credibility, especially in the food landscape, where multinational companies exert substantial control over the agenda. I reflect more on this topic in the section on funding below.

Some members of EAT's Advisory Board also bring in an important policy perspective. For instance, the current Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, former Minister of Health and Minister of Foreign Affairs, contributed ample experience with how politics and policy operate in silos across local, national, and international levels. Støre had a great professional network and could reach out to high-level people EAT wanted to speak with, such as Special Adviser to the UN Jeffrey Sachs.²³⁹ Another central figure in the EAT network was Usman Mushtaq. At the time he got engaged with EAT,

²³⁶ Harmer, "Does Global Health Really Need Richard Horton?"

²³⁷ Shiffman, "Knowledge, moral claims and the exercise of power in global health," 298.

²³⁸ Fuchs, *Business Power in Global Governance*.

²³⁹ Haukali, "Setter bærekraftig mat på verdenskartet."

he was a young medical student and the Norwegian Youth Delegate to the UN. As Deputy Leader of one of the largest student organizations in the world, IFMSA, Mushtaq had a network in the UN system. In 2014 he was able to negotiate access for EAT to hold a side event in the UN building during the General Assembly.²⁴⁰ The examples of Støre and Mushtaq demonstrate an essential element to EAT's success. Several of the network members had political capacity and were experienced with navigating the political environment. This is a valuable skill that is not particularly common for networks, especially those that are largely science-based.²⁴¹ As a new, inexperienced organization EAT did not have much structural power. But the individuals and their organizations did. When travelling around attending meetings, they could lobby EAT's mission in their personal capacities. It was a network of powerful and resourceful people, providing access to important policy arenas.

To sum up, EAT is quite a broad and diverse movement. Shiffman and colleagues point to studies that argue that heterogeneous groups consisting of a diversity of actors achieve better results than uniform ones and suggests this might also be the case for networks.²⁴² One can argue this is the case for EAT. It gains certain capabilities due to its multi-disciplinary, multi-actor and multi-sectoral composition. In sum, the network holds a broad specter of skills, resources, and power. Wealthy foundations bring instrumental and structural power. The research community brings discursive and epistemic power. Politicians and business leaders bring instrumental and structural power. All provide beneficial credibility, legitimacy, prestige, network, and knowledge.

The combination of actors further enables innovative ways of working together. EAT's double triple helix structure can be seen as quite original. Wealthy funders sponsoring research is certainly not new, but this is then combined with sophisticated advocacy towards society at large and partnerships to bring about a policy response. As noted by Lawrence et al., this translation of research into policy and practice made possible by philanthropic foundations is quite innovative.²⁴³ This has also been reflected upon by Johan Rockström:

²⁴⁰ Stordalen, "Det store bildet," 20.

²⁴¹ Shiffman et al. "The emergence and effectiveness of global health networks."

²⁴² Shiffman et al. "A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks," i9.

²⁴³ Lawrence et al. "Sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets," 2917.

I must just say this as an academic, never before have I ever in my career had the opportunity to do a scientific assessment within a context where you have the double triple-helix of EAT, where you have business, policy, and academia working together right from the very go. We have been so nervous Walter and I over the last few years because we know people are just hanging there on the door, just waiting for the numbers. And we said, oh my God, what if we can't deliver! It has never happened before. I mean, you're right, we normally just produce our scientific papers and off we go. This time it is like, the other way around. It is rather that the moment we step down from this scene, we are off and – action! And I am not sure if we'll keep pace with Gunhild and the team, but we will do our best!²⁴⁴

Although cross-sectoral collaboration holds a lot of potential, it does not come without its challenges. Heterogeneous groups might be hampered by disagreements.²⁴⁵ A broad network often consists of powerful people with conflicting agendas and values. These are not necessarily easy to balance out. This can also seem to be the case with EAT, as shown in the lack of consensus on EAT's future direction. The most notable issue of contention has been, according to Stordalen to what degree EAT should involve large private actors such as Nestlé.²⁴⁶

Although I describe EAT as a diverse multi-actor partnership, it can also be characterized as relatively homogenous. Initially, most of the key figures in the network were well-educated powerful researchers, politicians, and philanthropists from the Global North. For this, EAT received criticism for being technocratic and elitist.²⁴⁷ Consumers, farmers, indigenous people, and other actors with important roles in the food systems were not part of the movement. As such, EAT avoided the more challenging aspects of inequality and injustice that many would argue to be key issues in the politics of food. Although EAT could be seen as homogenous in the beginning, they seem to have addressed this criticism and included more diverse representation in the Advisory Board and at the EAT Stockholm Food Forums.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ EAT on YouTube, "Changing the food system is a necessity," 21:50-22:39.

²⁴⁵ Shiffman et al. "A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks," i9.

²⁴⁶ Stordalen, "Det store bildet," 193-194.

²⁴⁷ Leroy and Hite, "The Place of Meat in Dietary Policy"; Rolness, "Mett på moralsk kapital."

²⁴⁸ Eatforum.org, "Advisory Board."

Taken together, I argue that EAT found a “sweet spot”, reaping the benefits of being multi-stakeholder, but at the same time remaining homogenous enough to find a way forward in an intricate food systems landscape. By being diverse, EAT holds substantial amounts of power. To what degree EAT really is heterogeneous can be questioned, but they successfully give the impression of it. Their multi-stakeholder identity and framework for change have also been important as to how the initiative has been perceived as a promising actor in the food agenda. It was the central reason for why individuals and organizations joined.²⁴⁹ As Clare Matterson, former Director of Strategy at the Wellcome Trust and member of the Board of Trustees at EAT, said:

Research alone will not drive the transformative change that's needed – evidence needs to be translated into action, which is exactly what the EAT Foundation will do. It will help decision-makers use research to build a healthy future for people and the natural world that we all rely on.²⁵⁰

Framing strategies

Another important aspect to consider is what Shiffman et al. describe as the actor's framing strategies, understood as “...how network actors publicly position an issue in order to attract attention and resources”.²⁵¹ Networks are more likely to be effective if they find ways of positioning the issue that resonate with people, especially political elites. In this section I argue that EAT found successful ways of framing both the problem and the opportunities with global food systems.

Central to EAT's framing strategy is a systemic perspective, situating food as key to many development problems and therefore requiring prioritization. In combining what we know on the forces that drive hunger, malnutrition, and environmental degradation, it is evident that we have a massive problem with the ways in which we produce, distribute, and consume food. EAT argues that our chances of getting this right are better if we adopt a food system approach. In a recent interview, Gunhild Stordalen said

²⁴⁹ Haukali, “Setter bærekraftig mat på verdenskartet”; Ravelo, “Q&A: ‘Transformation takes time,’ Richard Horton on the EAT-Lancet Commission diet.”

²⁵⁰ Stockholmresilience.org, “Introducing the EAT Foundation.”

²⁵¹ Shiffman et al. “A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks,” i9.

that her success in convincing people can be explained by the “obviousness” of her message. Everybody agrees with EAT’s approach she claims: “...as long as you get half an hour to explain, then everybody just, oh shit, it is like an enlightenment moment, an eureka moment.”²⁵²

Importantly, although the problem is severe and challenging, EAT’s framing is optimistic and solution-oriented, as captured in the slogan “Food can fix it”.²⁵³ As such, EAT frames food system change not only as necessary, but as doable. Food is a vital resource that all human beings need and consume daily. As we are all consumers of food, we are all part of the system and can all do something about it. As such, even though food systems are known to be extremely complex, food is framed as a “simple” solution to a complex problem. If we produce and consume food that is good for both us and for the planet, we can achieve several aims at once. There are many potential win-wins with an interlinked approach. According to Usman Mushtaq, many working within health and sustainability saw great potential in nudging more environmentally friendly consumption by coupling motivations for taking care of the planet with motivations for looking after personal health.²⁵⁴ There was an emerging debate within nutrition research on the need for defining healthy, sustainable diets.²⁵⁵ Research shows that people do not care that much about the environmental footprint when deciding what to eat. Factors like taste, availability and health are often more important. But if people know that healthy food is also better for the environment, they are supposedly more likely to choose wiser.²⁵⁶ The potential of coupling the health argument to more sustainable consumption is appealing, as it seems like a simple solution to extremely complex problems. If food really can fix it, the solutions to a broken food system are available to all of us several times a day.

By saying we can all take part in the food system transformation, EAT appealed both to individual responsibility and to collective action. To deliver on the SDGs and the Paris

²⁵² Banik, “Transforming our global food system,” 48:59-49:09.

²⁵³ Eatforum.org, “Coming Together to Fix Food.”

²⁵⁴ Interview with Usman Mushtaq, January 11, 2023.

²⁵⁵ FAO, “Biodiversity and Sustainable Diets”; Lang and Barling, “Nutrition and sustainability: an emerging food policy discourse.”

²⁵⁶ Sanchez-Sabate and Sabaté, “Consumer Attitudes Towards Environmental Concerns of Meat Consumption.”

Agreement is certainly demanding, but it is a common mission and something that connects us all. Everyone can do their part. This is a powerful framing: Ideas that appeal to collective action are particularly powerful in agenda setting processes.²⁵⁷ It is inviting, open, and positive. We might not solve everything, but we can still do a lot. To bring about radical changes to our food system might seem impossible, but if we see ourselves as small, but important pieces of the puzzle, the road ahead appears easier to walk. Such framing emphasizing incremental change brings hope that there is a tractable way forward.

Another important aspect of EAT's framing strategy is that it was surprisingly concrete. EAT not only talked about the importance of food system transformation and what we can do about it. It also provided concrete examples of solutions. EAT's mission to transform our global food system can easily become too big and bold. As commented by Jonas Gahr Støre at one of the EAT Forums, it was "a pretty tall order."²⁵⁸ It is difficult to identify actions without using general and vague language. However, I argue that EAT avoided this trap by also attempting to do what it preached in practice, and by producing concrete solutions to the problem. First, they did so by inviting actors to participate in multi-stakeholder dialogues in their projects and forums. Multi-stakeholder dialogues were suggested to be a valuable tool to advance food system change across sectors. Second, with the EAT-*Lancet* Commission, EAT produced a concrete framework with quantitative scientific targets for healthy diets and sustainable food production that could be used to guide business and policy. Most targets and strategies within sustainability are vague, but EAT's universal reference diet is concrete enough for policy translation. Such an approach gives relatively clear directions for the way forward.

EAT's framing strategies also had their challenges. Talking about systemic issues is important but can become too abstract. But when solutions presented are more concrete, they may also become more politically and culturally sensitive. EAT spent considerable amounts of money on communicating the EAT-*Lancet* report in simple terms, producing among other things executive summaries made especially for both

²⁵⁷ Finnemore and Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change."

²⁵⁸ EAT on YouTube, "Jonas Gahr Støre," 2:39.

policymakers, farmers, and cities, and providing the summary report in 11 languages.²⁵⁹ But food and health are personal topics related to culture, identity, and values. When put clearly into models, without commenting too much on the challenging aspects, many responded with unease.²⁶⁰ Although EAT's systemic perspective demands structural and political action, the focus on diets can also be perceived as a very individualistic approach. This is politically delicate. Attempting to nudge consumer behavior change denounces the neo-liberal ethos of freedom of choice and consumer sovereignty.²⁶¹ When scientists and philanthropists go out telling people what to eat, it can be accused of being a top-down, elitist initiative. As the influential food writer Joanna Blythman put it, the EAT-*Lancet* Commission came out as "a top-down attempt by a small, unrepresentative dogmatic global elite to mold public agriculture policy".²⁶² The EAT-*Lancet* Commission also received quite a pushback from the meat industry, as demonstrated by Garcia and colleagues.²⁶³ This shows that talking broadly about food systems, health, sustainability, and collaboration across sectors is easier than to be specific about how individuals can contribute through dietary changes.

While there was a setback, this was not necessarily too damaging to EAT. Communicating controversial and provoking suggestions to promote sustainability can also be a wise communication strategy. As Managing Director Arne Haugen put it; "people wake up when someone starts interfering with how much meat you should eat."²⁶⁴ If all publicity is good publicity, EAT benefited from the negative commentaries appearing in the aftermath of the EAT-*Lancet* Commission. As EAT saw it, it ended up as a brilliant, but unplanned strategy.²⁶⁵ This statement is also supported by the master's thesis written by Latini on the debate on meat and sustainability in Norway following the launch of the Commission. She found that although EAT was faced with opposition, the organization largely succeeded in getting its message through in the Norwegian public. Latini explained this with the legitimacy of the scientific report making it hard to argue against.²⁶⁶

²⁵⁹ Eatforum.org, "EAT-Lancet Commission Summary Report."

²⁶⁰ Anthony, "How diet became the latest front in the culture wars."

²⁶¹ Lang and Barling, "Nutrition and sustainability: An-emerging-food-policy-discourse."

²⁶² Blythman, "Why we should resist the vegan putsch."

²⁶³ Garcia et al. "EATLancet vs yes2meat."

²⁶⁴ Interview with Arne Haugen, December 12, 2022.

²⁶⁵ Interview with Arne Haugen, December 20, 2022.

²⁶⁶ Latini, "Rødt kjøtt, grønne rammer."

Overall, I find that EAT succeeded in building a compelling argument for food systems change by describing complex matters in simple terms. EAT framed food systems change as tractable and something positive we can all contribute to achieve. They were not only successful in framing a strategy and a solution, but also in demonstrating what this meant in practice. By arranging multi-stakeholder dialogues and collaborations, and by developing and disseminating valuable interdisciplinary research, EAT portrayed itself as part of the solution it was designed to solve. Both the way the issue was framed, and the way EAT framed their solutions, “hit a nerve.”²⁶⁷ This brings important explanations to EAT’s emergence and effectiveness. It can help explain why all these actors got along, and why the movement emerged and gained traction. EAT demonstrated great capacity to communicate and frame a vision that attracted attention to the initiative.

Issue characteristics

Network and actor features are as we have seen central to understand the emergence and effectiveness of networks. Another crucial factor to consider is the issue at hand. What problem is EAT addressing? Is it affecting a broad specter of society, or just a handful of people? How severe is the issue, and how difficult is it to solve? The framework developed by Shiffman et al. finds issue characteristics such as severity, tractability and affected groups, central to why networks emerge and whether they end up being successful or not. In this section, I argue that EAT addresses a severe, complex issue affecting people all over the world that is exceptionally challenging to solve. I find that these challenges bring significant explanations to why an actor like EAT became relevant.

Severity

EAT’s mission is to transform our global food system.²⁶⁸ Food systems are defined by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in the following way:

²⁶⁷ Banik, “Transforming our global food system,” 42:15.

²⁶⁸ Eatforum.org, “Our Vision, Mission and Values.”

A *food system* gathers all the elements (environment, people, inputs, processes, infrastructures, institutions, etc.) and activities that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, and the output of these activities, including socio-economic and environmental outcomes.²⁶⁹

To change the ways in which we consume, produce, and distribute food have for long been recognized as a necessary step on achieve sustainable development. Food systems intersect with all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals: If people suffer from hunger, it is hard to achieve other goals such as peace, decent work, economic growth, and gender equality. Sustainable, healthy living conditions for life on land and life below water rests on a food system that does not overconsume resources and overstep planetary limits. Food is key to a vast array of global issues such as hunger, malnutrition, health, climate change and environment. These are all extremely severe issues demanding immediate action.

However, a fair and sustainable global food system for healthy people is a vision far from the reality of today. Food security is deteriorating globally. Despite continuous commitments to end hunger by 2030, food insecurity has risen since 2014. In 2021, 828 million people suffered from hunger, an increase of 46 million since the previous year. 3.1 billion people are unable to afford a healthy diet. Food prices are rising, and agricultural produce and supply-chains are more unreliable due to rising conflict, climate change and economic shocks. The situation has been further destabilized with the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The FAO projects that 8 percent of the world's population will still be facing hunger in 2030.²⁷⁰

Such numbers lead to serious forms of malnutrition. Close to 10 percent of the world population is undernourished. In 2019, nearly one third of women aged 15-49 were affected by anemia, and 22 percent of children under five were stunted in 2020. At the same time, we are facing serious health issues related to obesity and consumption of unhealthy foods, such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. More than 13 percent of the world's adult population is obese, and the number is on the rise in all regions.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ HLPE, Food losses and waste in the context of sustainable food systems, 12.

²⁷⁰ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022.

²⁷¹ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022.

Illnesses resulting from unhealthy diets are now the number one cause of premature deaths globally. Dietary improvements have the potential to avert approximately 20 percent of all deaths worldwide.²⁷²

The way we produce, trade, and consume food also has devastating consequences for our planet. According to the Planetary Boundaries Framework developed by Rockström and colleagues, five out of nine Earth systems crucial for planetary health have already transgressed the threshold for a safe operating space for humanity: climate change, biodiversity loss, land-systems change, phosphorus and nitrogen levels and chemical pollution.²⁷³ Food systems are central in driving all these changes. As much as one third of greenhouse gas emissions driving climate change are estimated to come from food systems.²⁷⁴ Deforestation, land loss, overuse of nitrogen, plastics and other chemicals are all large drivers of environmental degradation tied to the production and consumption of food. To change the course, we must undertake rapid, far-reaching, and “unprecedented transitions in all aspects of society.”²⁷⁵

The issues EAT addresses are without doubt extremely severe. How has this affected EAT’s emergence and effectiveness? One could say an extremely severe issue means it would be easier for a network to emerge. The issue is simply too serious and the potential too promising to not have anyone working on it. Building a network around a noble cause is a prerequisite for success. It means your voice will be heard, it will be easier to attract funding, and people will hope for the network to achieve results. This seems to have been the case for EAT. Despite occasional objections, EAT has operated in a friendly environment. Consequently, we can say that severity is a factor enabling emergence and effectiveness. But this should also be nuanced. The degree of severity depends on what issue related to the food system we look at. Hunger is more life threatening than most hidden forms of malnutrition. And although the consequences of climate change will affect the entire world, some populations will suffer more than others. Some people would even feel completely distanced from both climate change

²⁷² GBD 2017 Diet Collaborators, “Health effects of dietary risks in 195 countries, 1990–2017.”

²⁷³ Steffen et al. “Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet,” and Persson et al. “Outside the Safe Operating Space of the Planetary Boundary for Novel Entities.”

²⁷⁴ IPCC, Climate Change and Land.

²⁷⁵ IPCC, Global warming of 1.5°C.

and food related health issues. That is why it is also valuable to consider another issue characteristic, namely which groups are affected.

Affected groups

The various issues of food systems affect people very differently. Issues of malnutrition differ relating to geography, gender, economic situation, and social status. Food producers and people working in the food supply chain are much more vulnerable to market disruption than workers in other sectors. And some geographical areas are more affected by climate change than others. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that the challenges connected to the ecological crisis are relevant for all human beings, in some form or other. This applies equally to health issues related to malnutrition. Non communicable diseases related to poor diets such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases are severe issues all over the world. Although some people do not experience health issues related to poor diets and do not experience any consequences of climate change or environmental degradation in their immediate surroundings, we all take part in the food systems simply by being consumers of food. As such, we can see food as an issue that all human beings relate to.

The fact that EAT engages in a universal topic can be seen as an enabling factor. If it is relevant to all, most people would be supportive of the initiative. In one way or the other, we will all benefit from food system transformations. Gunhild Stordalen has brought about the universality of EAT's mission as an explanation for how EAT could grow so quickly.²⁷⁶ But it can also be the opposite. Universality might take some of the edge off. What does food system transformation look like in practice in different parts of the world? It can be challenging to convey a message and a path forward that appeals to a broad specter of people in completely different situations. Food systems change will take on diverse expressions around the world, and it must be challenging to balance out the nuances. For instance, a common advice for healthy sustainable diets is to eat less red meat. Though this might be the case in many circumstances, it is wrong in others. Many would benefit from introducing more meat to their diets. Some would also argue it would be more sustainable to eat local sustainably grassed-fed meat than imported fish or pulses from the other side of the world. Further, the responsibility for

²⁷⁶ Johannessen, "Gunhild Stordalen får svensk minister-støtte."

food issues is unequally distributed. Some are duty bearers, whereas others are rights holders. And normatively speaking, some parts of the world hold greater responsibility to change their behaviors than others. A broad, inclusive “all is affected”-approach might struggle to find tangible actions on the way forward. As discussed in the section on framing strategies, the generalizing angle EAT took in their research resulted in opposition.

Tractability

Based on the discussion above, one can say that EAT addresses a severe topic that has interest and appeals to people all over the world. Food system transformation is such a large and vague topic that we can all relate to it in some way or another. But how can we solve such a complex matter? Is it even near to being tractable? Shiffman et al. find that networks are more likely to emerge and become successful if the task the network intends to solve is tractable.

A general, systemic approach to food like the one EAT takes might be intuitive and appealing, but it certainly is not the easiest entrance point for negotiating a political solution. Such an encompassing, global problem is not easy to solve, and massive structural measures are needed. And compared to other development issues like climate change, we have come much shorter in terms of defining and understanding the issue and providing a solid, reconciled knowledge base for the way forward. Accordingly, global governance of food systems is still in its infancy, especially if we make the comparison to global climate change governance. We have just recently started taking a systemic approach to food, and the task of convening all relevant actors across disciplines, sectors, and political institutions, is by no means a simple one. EAT is aware of the complexity of a systemic approach. Gunhild Stordalen wrote in her book that she was quite naive in the beginning, but that she soon understood there were strong forces at play.²⁷⁷

The fact that EAT addresses a seemingly intractable governance issue can at first sight be deemed as a factor hampering the organization’s emergence and effectiveness. Is it possible for an initiative like EAT to bring solutions to such a challenging task?

²⁷⁷ Stordalen, “Det store bildet,” 175.

However, intractability could in fact be an important explanation for EAT's success. As discussed in the previous section on framing strategy, EAT portrayed a powerful message that food systems change indeed was possible, and that multi-stakeholder approaches were a tractable way forward. EAT came out as a new, agile initiative led by powerful individuals, able to communicate a strong message and build momentum for new ways of understanding and governing food. As we will see in the next section, this was possibly exactly what was needed in a challenging policy environment.

Policy environment

As my analysis until now has shown, EAT appeared in the food systems agenda as a strong, but flexible new actor able to bring new framings and new solutions to food systems transformation. EAT successfully envisioned a tractable way forward for an extremely severe development issue affecting people from all over the world. However, to fully understand how these factors were important, we must look at the policy environment. This category in Shiffman et al.'s framework concerns the broader context networks operate within, the external factors that shape both the nature of the network and their goals and strategies.

As described in chapter 2, global governance of food can be characterized as a fragmented and complex landscape. The various parts of food policy still largely operate in silos. A strong multilateral response to food insecurity is hindered both by institutional complexity, but also by the control a few large multinational companies have over the agenda. The political environment can also be described as conflicted, where the various actors with a stake in food systems operate within different policy paradigms of diverging ideologies, values, and missions. The situation appears to have been particularly gridlocked at the time EAT showed up. One of the informants were under the impression that the whole policy field was "... not down with a broken back, but it was all a bit dead."²⁷⁸ In this situation, many saw EAT as a promising new actor with resources and knowledge to make something happen. The informant was under the impression that people thought Gunhild Stordalen could be "a new Gates," referring to

²⁷⁸ Interview with informant 2, January 8, 2021.

how the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has had a substantial impact within the global governance of health field.²⁷⁹ The timing and the context have thus been significant factors for an actor like EAT to thrive. In the following sections, we take a closer look at factors like existing norms, allies and opponents, and funding. The analysis demonstrates that EAT was just the right actor at the right time to fill a vacuum in food systems governance.

Norms

Importantly, EAT emerged at a time when certain new norms and ideas were gaining prominence in global governance. International policy for development and environment finally reached a turning point with the adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. The new development goals represented a shift towards interconnected and systemic perspectives on development, departing from the more one-dimensional approach of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). An illustrative example of this shift can be seen in how food and hunger are addressed in the respective frameworks. Under the MDGs, the first goal aimed to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, with food being subject to only one target: to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.²⁸⁰ In contrast, the SDGs separated poverty and hunger into distinct goals, with the first goal focusing on eradicating poverty and the second goal aiming for zero hunger. Goal number 2 also includes specific targets on food, such as improving nutrition, enhancing food producers' income, promoting resilient agricultural practices, safeguarding land and soil quality, and preserving genetic diversity of seeds, plants, and animals.²⁸¹ Although there is no dedicated goal specifically for food, this shift clearly indicates the recognition that hunger cannot be effectively addressed in isolation.

The SDGs reflect the normative position that development must be addressed systemically and through interdisciplinary input. Such an approach requires us to take a step back and revise our governance models and structures. Over the years we have gradually acknowledged that the fragmented multilateral system is clearly not rigged for

²⁷⁹ Interview with informant 2, January 8, 2021.

²⁸⁰ Un.org, "Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty & Hunger."

²⁸¹ Undp.org, "Sustainable Development Goals."

holistic policy development. The crises of our modern world are simply too complex and systemic for states to manage alone. We have increasingly engaged in new forms of governance models such as public-private collaboration and multi-stakeholder initiatives.²⁸² As demonstrated in the literature review, this is particularly prevalent in the food governance landscape. With the SDGs clearly stating that sustainable development relies on strong global partnerships, multistakeholderism has become an integral, institutionalized part of international governance.

This acknowledgement is clearly visible in the emerging academic debates on food systems and food systems governance. The global governance of food landscape is characterized by the ever-evolving understanding of how we should define and approach food as an issue. For the past century, food has conceptually been addressed as an issue of food insecurity and hunger. Multilateral institutions have been established and reformed according to the widening conceptualization of food insecurity, directing efforts at agricultural development, food availability, aid and distribution, market stabilization, and nutritional aspects.²⁸³ But researchers, governments, civil society, and private sector actors have for decades argued for more holistic and integrated approaches to policy.²⁸⁴ Food crisis after food crisis have demonstrated that food insecurity must be seen as a systemic issue, directly interlinked with other development issues such as health, environment, economic growth, poverty, inequality, agriculture, and so on. This has favored an emerging food systems perspective.

The concept of food systems has been prevalent for decades, but it gained much more prominence in recent years.²⁸⁵ Both the financial crisis and the food crisis in 2007-2008 revealed once again how interconnected we are as a global society and demonstrated the flaws of our current governance systems. There was a desperate need to rethink policy and governance and adopt more systemic approaches. Video recordings from the first EAT Stockholm Food Forum bear witness to the prevailing food system perspective. The speakers talked about the need for new ways of conceptualizing and working with

²⁸² Andonova, *Governance Entrepreneurs*, 13.

²⁸³ Clapp, "Food and hunger."

²⁸⁴ See for instance Young et al. "Earth system challenges and a multi-layered approach for the sustainable development goals," and Nilsson and Homeyer, "International regimes and environmental policy Integration."

²⁸⁵ Béné et al. "When food systems meet sustainability."

food. As member of EAT's Advisory Board and former Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General David Nabarro put it:

...that recognition of interconnections, which in the agriculture and food space, has really become strong, since 2008, is just one example of where global governance is having to be rethought because of interdependence, and because so many different groups have to be involved.²⁸⁶

Jonas Gahr Støre also gave a speech where he told the audience he was at the forum out of frustration over "...the failure of politics to grasp the interconnections of themes that break the silos that we are organized into."²⁸⁷ He said politicians like himself fail in their systems to address issues as interdependent, and that he came to EAT hoping that the movement would give policy a push in the right direction.

The prevalent norms in favor of food systems governance and multi-stakeholder partnerships have thus clearly enabled EAT's emergence and effectiveness. Despite some resistance towards private sector influence in the food landscape, the overall governance climate was receptive to innovative attempts at bringing systemic approaches to development policy. And EAT not only advocated for multi-stakeholder approaches to food systems transformation but also aimed to embody those principles itself. In this way, EAT served as a platform and facilitator for the much-needed discussion on how food should be approached more holistically. As a pioneer in sustainability sciences, Rockström was a promising figure to bring the scientific debate on food and sustainability forward. While the benefits of a food system perspective were widely acknowledged, no single entity or actor dominated this agenda. EAT, as a flexible, fast-moving, and resourceful network, was able to capitalize on the prevailing trends, and could take intellectual ownership of a multi-stakeholder food systems approach.

Allies and opponents

Shiffman's framework predicts that network expansion is facilitated if the advocated cause is aligned with the interests of other groups. Opponents will challenge network

²⁸⁶ EAT on YouTube, "Dr David Nabarro", 7:14.

²⁸⁷ EAT on YouTube, "Jonas Gahr Støre," 1:45-2:09.

legitimacy and issue promotion, but their existence may also inspire mobilization.²⁸⁸ As the analysis above has shown, this is the case for EAT. According to Gunhild Stordalen, most people she reached out to in the first year were interested and willing to collaborate with EAT.²⁸⁹ This is not surprising. EAT was a science-based forum working to advance the scientific foundation for policy and advocating collaboration across sectors and academic disciplines. Through dialogue, EAT convened actors across political and scientific disciplines to discuss and learn from each other. EAT could thus be seen as an open space for dialogue between some of the different, often conflicting perspectives on food policy. Such an initiative was welcomed in a polarized, conflicted debate. There were sceptics, especially since EAT was willing to cooperate closely with the private sector.²⁹⁰ Some also found it challenging to understand what affiliation with EAT really entailed and whether a partnership ended up simply being a cover for attracting legitimacy and a better reputation.²⁹¹ Others, such as Jeffrey Sachs, could question the ambitiousness of the initiative and its chances for success.²⁹² But there seems to be little direct opposition to the initiative. Overall, for the first years EAT found itself in a friendly environment.

EAT would later confront more opposition as projects and partnerships became more pronounced. As mentioned previously, the EAT-*Lancet* report was subject to plenty of criticism, especially from the meat and dairy industry. Some groups with commercial interests implied it was a smokescreen for veganism, and that if taken seriously, the report could cause dramatic disruption to the food systems as we know them.²⁹³ In Norway, a country with strong national agricultural policies to protect small farmers in rural areas, EAT received criticism for not taking into accounts local and regional variations to health and sustainability.²⁹⁴ Many would also ridicule the very restricted meat intake proposed by the Planetary Health Diet.²⁹⁵ Gunhild Stordalen was also criticized for being a hypocritical messenger, advocating people to eat plants for the

²⁸⁸ Shiffman et al. "A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks," i9.

²⁸⁹ Stordalen, "Det store bildet," 112-113.

²⁹⁰ Stordalen, "Det store bildet," 112-113.

²⁹¹ Interview with informant 2, January 8, 2021.

²⁹² Stordalen, "Det store bildet," 156.

²⁹³ Lawrence et al. "Sustainable, resilient food systems for healthy diets," 2918.

²⁹⁴ Johannessen, "Kjøttbransje-topper reagerer på ny kostholds-rapport: – Ikke mulig."

²⁹⁵ Berg, "Sp-topp slakter Gunhilds EAT-rapport."

sake of the environment while cruising around in her private jet.²⁹⁶ It is hard to judge whether this resistance weakened or fueled EAT's work. According to Shiffman et al., opposition does not always have a negative impact. It might also boost network outcomes and inspire more mobilization. On the one hand, the criticism directed towards the EAT-*Lancet* diet may have tarnished the project's reputation and undermined its credibility. On the other hand, it could be argued that this opposition had a positive impact on EAT's effectiveness. As discussed earlier, EAT's framing strategy can largely be considered successful. Overall, the intense debate served to elevate the importance of food, diets, and agricultural policies on the political agenda, precisely as EAT intended.

EAT has also been subject to criticism in academic circles. The main critique was that the report was a theoretical endeavor "disconnected from reality, including the challenges that people in different parts of the world face given their particular context and income level".²⁹⁷ The Planetary Health Diet developed by the EAT-*Lancet* Commission is a reference diet that does not consider local and regional variations in health and sustainability. As such it appears much distanced from real life experience. Hirvonen et al. have further estimated the affordability of the diet, concluding it was too expensive for at least 1.58 billion people around the world.²⁹⁸ However, none of the critical reactions are directly opposing the Commission's overall findings. Their responses serve as valuable supplements to the research, offering additional perspectives and findings that enrich the academic debate. The report is in sum widely praised as an important contribution. Over the years, numerous published articles have emerged, aiming to expand on the Commission's work and address the gaps identified by other researchers. I thus find that criticism towards the EAT-*Lancet* Commission simply reinforces EAT's position.

EAT seems to have acquired more opponents after their involvement with the UN Food Systems Summit 2021. EAT has in the after wake been referred to with skepticism due to its close affiliation with private sector actors. Many find it problematic how they

²⁹⁶ Bagot, "Globe-trotting billionaire behind campaign to save planet accused of blatant hypocrisy."

²⁹⁷ Fakhri, "The Food System Summit's Disconnection From People's Real Needs."

²⁹⁸ Hirvonen et al. "Affordability of the EAT-*Lancet* reference diet: a global analysis."

merge with the World Economic Forum's Global Redesign agenda.²⁹⁹ Further, in the same way EAT's neutral, scientific approach brought them plenty of allies, the approach can also be criticized for avoiding the central problem of our global food system, being the corporate control and their historic responsibility for driving many of the social and environmental crises we face today.³⁰⁰ There is a fine line between science and politics and EAT and the UN Food Systems Summit have been criticized for avoiding the demanding, but much needed debate around power.³⁰¹ As argued by Montenegro de Wit and Iles, to avoid a discussion around power is in many ways the same as reinforcing the dominant narrative around food proposed by the corporate sector.³⁰² It is too early to say how this new opposition has affected EAT's effectiveness. It might have weakened its image as a neutral science-based actor, a factor that has been crucial for emergence and effectiveness up until now. At the same time, to be allies with the powerful corporate sector does not necessarily weaken EAT's position on the food systems agenda.

Funding

Another factor in Shiffman et al.'s framework for network emergence and effectiveness is funding. Funding is often necessary for successful mobilization around a cause, and it can be an important factor for why networks crystallize in the first place. Though funding can be seen as a characteristic of the network, Shiffman et al. place this factor in the policy environment category. This is because they find it interesting to analyze whether the network's dependency on donors is perceived as a positive or negative thing. This is as a factor external to the network. Here, I cover both aspects of the factor, as I find them both relevant to the case.

Financial capacity can at first sight be seen as an essential factor for EAT's emergence and effectiveness. As discussed earlier, the large budgets gave the initiative a flying start and enabled important projects such as the EAT Stockholm Food Forum and the EAT-*Lancet* Commission. EAT was also quickly able to attract funding from other sources than the Stordalen Foundation, which was by no means a matter of course. It

²⁹⁹ Chandrasekaran et al. "Exposing corporate capture of the UNFSS through multistakeholderism."

³⁰⁰ Fakhri, "The Food System Summit's Disconnection From People's Real Needs."

³⁰¹ Canfield et al. "UN Food Systems Summit 2021."

³⁰² Montenegro de Wit and Iles, "Woke Science and the 4th Industrial Revolution."

demonstrates that EAT was viewed as a credible, promising initiative by important actors in the field such as the Wellcome Trust. However, some reservations must be made. For the first couple of years, EAT was run by a network of dedicated individuals. They were not all employed by EAT but were forwarding EAT's agenda through their capacities as leaders in their jobs as academics, politicians, and business leaders. While affiliation with EAT may have provided funding opportunities for some of their projects, engagement in EAT must also be seen as driven by personal motivation and a belief in the cause. Collaboration with EAT does also bring certain benefits like expanded networks, participation in glamorous high-profile events, and reputational benefits. It is therefore worth taking seriously the interlinked nature of financial and non-financial incentives for partaking in EAT's work.

Further, although funding has been crucial in some projects such as the *EAT-Lancet* Commission and the EAT Stockholm Food Forum, EAT has also demonstrated considerable network capacity to make things happen without financial aspects involved. The most obvious example is how the larger network, especially through the partnership with WEF, has helped EAT bring their agenda all the way up to a world summit on food. Although money certainly facilitated such structural power, it is also due to considerable personal and network power that is not simply explained by financial power. As such, one could say EAT might have emerged as a research network without substantial funding helping it. Nevertheless, it is certain it would never have grown and obtained such an influential position without being backed up by powerful and well-reputed donors.

While EAT's substantial budgets certainly facilitated network expansion, relying on donor funding can also hamper network effectiveness. Formal ties to donors and the private sector have the potential to damage legitimacy and credibility.³⁰³ This can be seen as a challenge to EAT. In 2018, 59 percent of EAT's funding originated in philanthropy and 29 percent originated in private sector (see figure 4).

³⁰³ Shiffman et al. "A framework on the emergence and effectiveness of global health networks."

EAT 2018

Total Funding (MNOK)*	44.5
Total Expenses (MNOK)	46.2
No. of Full-Time Employees	24

Funding by origin (MNOK)

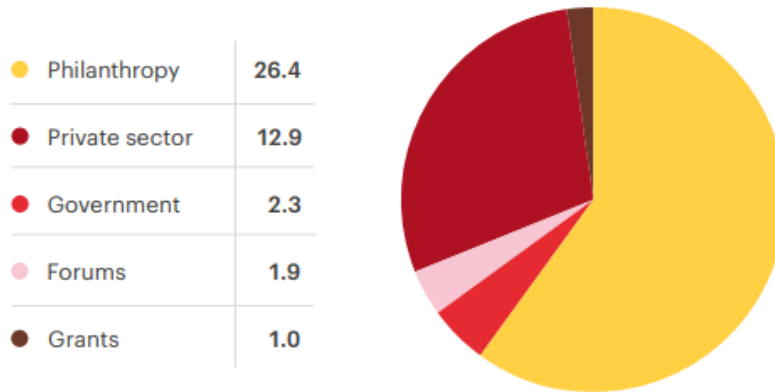


Figure 4: EAT’s financial overview 2018 (numbers reflect Million Norwegian Kroner).³⁰⁴

As mentioned previously, EAT’s relationship with the private sector has been a source of conflict internally in the organization, as well as an issue of concern for affiliated actors. Being a multi-stakeholder partnership with a heavily invested private sector requires to continuously balance a fine line. Researchers have pointed out that multi-stakeholder initiatives often struggle to provide adequate structures to manage power imbalances.³⁰⁵ Without proper representation and checks and balances of power, multi-stakeholder partnerships must be considered illegitimate governance initiatives.

In the case of EAT, it is unclear how corporate influence is being managed. The problem is supposedly alleviated by a “Chinese Wall”, a barrier set up to prevent

³⁰⁴ Eatforum.org, “EAT Annual Review 2018,” 35.

³⁰⁵ McKeon, “Are Equity and Sustainability a Likely Outcome When Foxes and Chickens Share the Same Coop?”

conflicts of interests.³⁰⁶ EAT is organized into three distinct legal entities; the foundation and two limited companies, EAT Stockholm Food Forum AB in Sweden and its subsidiary, EAT Stockholm Food Forum AS in Norway.³⁰⁷ This separation ensures that EAT can receive funding both from the private sector and non-profits. To ensure the academic integrity of EAT's scientific endeavors, the financing of the science-related activities is strictly channeled through the foundation, while the rest of the organization's activities in policy and engagement can be financed through the companies. Although EAT insists that their private sector affiliation is of no hinder for academic integrity, their relationship with the private sector could certainly be a topic for further research.

In theory, funding from large philanthropies such as the Wellcome Trust can also weaken legitimacy and credibility. For instance, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) has as mentioned previously been criticized for representing agribusiness under the disguise of being African farmer led. This is because the initiative was founded and sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, known to promote large scale green technological business solutions to enhance food productivity and sustainability. AGRA's affiliation with the Gates Foundation has damaged its credibility in some environments.³⁰⁸

The threat of being negatively influenced by powerful donors does not seem to be applicable to EAT. While the Stordalen Foundation is closely affiliated with the corporate world, the Stordalen business cannot be said to have political or economic incentives for engaging in the food and agriculture sector. It is also a small, new, and unknown philanthropy compared to for instance the Gates Foundation. Further, the Wellcome Trust is a highly regarded and well-reputed funder in global health. Even though some of the foundation's investments have been subject to criticism,³⁰⁹ their sponsorship gives more legitimacy and credibility than damage to EAT.

³⁰⁶ Eatforum.org, "EAT Annual review 2018," page 34.

³⁰⁷ Eatforum.org, "EAT Annual review 2018," page 34.

³⁰⁸ Chandrasekaran et al. "Exposing corporate capture of the UNFSS through multistakeholderism," 11.

³⁰⁹ Carrington, "Wellcome Trust defies campaigners to increase fossil fuel investment"; Piller, "At arm's length."

7. Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I start by summarizing the analysis of factors explaining emergence and effectiveness and reflect on limitations. Then, I discuss how my findings provide insights to understand EAT's role within global food systems governance. Finally, I reflect on the added value of the study and give suggestions for further studies.

How did EAT emerge as an influential actor?

The analysis of factors contributing to network emergence and effectiveness offers valuable insights into how EAT has emerged as a prominent actor in the sustainable food systems agenda. Firstly, EAT is a powerful and diverse network comprised of capable and resourceful individuals who have found ways of working together effectively. The two main leaders exhibit exceptional motivation and dedication and demonstrate a strong capacity to mobilize around the cause. Their competences, networks and appearance complement each other effectively. Furthermore, the broader EAT network encompasses a diverse range of stakeholders from different sectors, presenting itself as a disruptive and promising movement advancing an emerging research and policy domain. EAT includes some of the worlds' most influential scientists within their fields, wealthy funders and business leaders, and well-connected individuals who know how to navigate the political environment. Collectively, EAT exerts significant instrumental, structural, and discursive power.

Importantly, EAT seems to have adopted appropriate governance structures that align with its broad and diverse movement. While encountering organizational challenges, EAT has successfully balanced between functioning as a loose, flexible, and expansive network and establishing a more tightly organized secretariat. The primary focus has been on advancing EAT's mission rather than prioritizing organizational consolidation, which has entailed relinquishing certain funding opportunities and ownership of promising initiatives. Although this approach has resulted in EAT remaining a relatively small organization, it can help elucidate the influence it wields in debates on food systems transformation.

EAT's effectiveness can also be explained in the ways in which the initiative developed promising solutions to several development issues, and the ways in which these strategies were communicated. By presenting a compelling case for the necessity for food systems change and framing it as both feasible in theory and practice, EAT has successfully positioned itself as an integral part of the solution it was designed to solve.

In addition to the network and actor characteristics, the characteristics of the issue EAT addresses bring additional perspectives on network emergence and effectiveness. The scope and the severity of food as an issue, especially if addressed systemically as EAT does, can arguably both hamper and facilitate network expansion. It is challenging to address a topic that is so broad that the groups that are affected and the degree of severity differ in every case. In their summary article, Shiffman and colleagues find that:

Sustaining a cohesive frame and building a broad coalition were often in tension: the former demanded focus, the latter wide appeal. Effective networks found ways to balance the two challenges.³¹⁰

This can be said to be the case for EAT. I find that EAT navigates a narrative that is both broad and vague enough to appear relevant for all, but at the same time manages to be specific enough to bring forward concrete solutions. Importantly, the severity and complexity of food systems as an issue demonstrate how crucial it was that EAT and the solutions it spoke of appeared as tractable ways forward. EAT's efforts to enhance tractability for food systems transformation must be seen as key for EAT's success in positioning itself as a relevant actor in food, health, and sustainability.

Further, an examination of the policy environment in which EAT operates is crucial to comprehending its success. Global governance of food is an extremely complex and fragmented political field. Typically, food-related issues are governed in isolated compartments, and multilateral institutions involved in the intersecting domains of food, health, and sustainability have encountered difficulties in forging meaningful collaborations. A significant challenge arises from the absence of a shared vision of

³¹⁰ Shiffman et al. "The emergence and effectiveness of global health networks," i117.

what a healthy, fair, and sustainable food system would look like, and thus what strategies are necessary to achieve such a vision. In these circumstances, there was a considerable vacuum both in science and policy EAT could fill.

Additionally, EAT emerged at a time when ideas and norms around development were changing. I find that EAT's agenda-setting was to great lengths enabled by the more interlinked and systemic perspectives introduced by the SDGs. The growing awareness of the interlinkages of our globalized world, as well as the multilateral system's inability to address them adequately, provided a compelling argument for a multi-stakeholder food systems approach. However, there was no single entity or actor dominating this agenda. As a resourceful, science-based movement, EAT was able to capitalize on the prevailing norms and could take intellectual ownership of the topic.

Finally, the analysis demonstrates the predominantly favorable policy environment in which EAT operates. Although EAT has encountered opposition and faced criticism concerning its close ties with the private sector, the association with corporate funding has both undermined and bolstered EAT's standing within the food systems agenda. While some groups have questioned EAT's credibility due to these affiliations, collaborating with influential private sector entities in a domain historically characterized by corporate influence may have actually strengthened EAT's position. The fact that EAT emerges as a robust and agile multi-stakeholder initiative supported by powerful private sector interests could be precisely why it has attained a prominent role in shaping the food systems agenda, regardless of whether the outcomes are perceived positively or negatively.

In sum, the framework to discern factors that enable network emergence and effectiveness captures several important explanations for how EAT emerged as an influential actor. Still, it is worth commenting on the limitations of applying such a comprehensive framework. In examining 10 different factors, the analysis offers a rather shallow investigation into certain central issues. A deeper analysis could have for instance engaged more fully with the burgeoning body of relevant literature on private authority, legitimacy, and claims to power. One could also pay closer attention to EAT's framing strategy and discuss agenda-setting theories. Nevertheless, I find a broad scope appropriate for a first case study of EAT.

Moreover, as discussed in the methods chapter, the fact that EAT addresses food as an intersectional topic has been challenging to navigate. A more comprehensive examination of the policy environment, a factor that in this case has proven to be decisive, could have offered additional insights. It is also worth reiterating that the analysis is considerably shaped by the bias resulting from the predominance of data produced by EAT themselves. A more balanced approach, including more secondary sources, could have resulted in a different conclusion.

EAT's role within global food systems governance

So, what does the analysis of how EAT emerged as an influential actor tell us? First and foremost, it offers insights to what kind of initiative EAT is, how it came about, and what influence it holds. EAT can be seen as both a private foundation, a multi-stakeholder initiative, and a network of individuals and organizations from business, science, and policy, that have come together to catalyze a food systems transformation. The network has done so by advancing the interdisciplinary academic and political debate on food systems and sustainable diets. EAT has thus contributed to the rise of attention to a food systems perspective and to multi-stakeholder dialogues as promising approaches to overall sustainable development. Accordingly, EAT can be said to have opened new epistemic terrain in the broader governance field of food, health, and sustainable development.

Moreover, the shift in how we conceptualize and govern food has fundamental consequences for global governance. The ontological difference between governing food systems instead of food security brings up important questions about responsibility, power, and accountability. In governing food security, states can be seen as the central actor that must be held accountable for providing safe, nutritious, and sustainable food for all. A food systems perspective on the other hand, acknowledges that authority and responsibility is distributed among various stakeholders throughout the value chain. This inevitably means that powerful private sector actors, such as the food industry, have significant roles to play in food systems governance. EAT's role thus falls into a broader tendency of private actors, especially philanthropic foundations

and partnerships, as brokers of multistakeholderism in global governance. This demonstrate why it is necessary to do more research on the role of private actors.

However, it is necessary to consider some nuances. As discussed in the theoretical chapter, the thesis is not designed to empirically establish evidence of what influence EAT holds. To what degree EAT is influential can thus be challenged. First, there are clear indications that EAT had a significant role in making the Summit a reality. However, EAT's specific role in the lead up to the Summit has not been investigated very thoroughly in this thesis. Second, EAT and Gunhild Stordalen appear to have demonstrated certain authority in getting a leading role at the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021. This is not necessarily compelling evidence of influence. It is not certain that the individuals and the organizations that were asked by the Secretary-General to lead work streams at the Summit were the most relevant or powerful in the food systems agenda. It could rather be an indication of EAT, with its experience in hosting food systems dialogues, was deemed an expert fit for the job. Although there is prestige in being appointed a leading role, this responsibility did not necessarily place them in an advantageous position.

Another point to be made is that although EAT has demonstrated influence in the food systems agenda, this does not necessarily indicate that they have an influential role in the broader governance field of food. The Summit has, as we have seen, been criticized for being an illegitimate multi-stakeholder event heavily dominated by a handful of civil society actors with a close affiliation to the corporate world. Importantly, the Summit was also organized by the office of the UN Secretary-General under the Sustainable Development umbrella, not by the UN organizations working on food. This is an important difference to acknowledge. EAT might have asserted influence on certain people and environments, but its authority might be limited in other circumstances or spheres.

Finally, it is worth repeating that EAT should be understood as a convener and a platform that gathered individuals and organizations already working to address food more holistically. The fact that David Nabarro in 2014 referred to EAT as “this process”

is quite telling.³¹¹ There were already several conceptual shifts underway, such as the evolving political and academic debate on sustainable and healthy diets, the process of developing new global development goals, and the World Economic Forum's Global Redesign Initiative. This is why it is more appropriate to understand EAT as an effective network of epistemic communities rather than an influential private foundation or multi-stakeholder initiative. Although it is difficult to identify the role and influence of EAT as a separate entity, it is certain that EAT as part of an ecosystem of actors has exerted considerable influence.

The analysis has accordingly offered valuable perspectives on EAT's role in global food systems governance. But importantly, it also sheds light on the political context. EAT operates in a political environment characterized by shifting norms and ideas regarding food, sustainability, and development. There is a desperate need to reform and restructure the multilateral response to overall development policy and experiment with innovative governance responses to address issues more interlinked. This points to the possibility that EAT's role can be seen from an alternative perspective. Rather than understanding EAT as an influential actor, another way to conceptualize EAT is as a "boundary organization," an entity operating on the boundaries of sectors or levels of governance to facilitate coordination.³¹² In his literature review of food security governance, Candel found calls for coherency and coordination across scales, as well as the failure of the current institutional architecture as two central themes in the literature. The literature also points to the potential of boundary organizations and their role in coordinating between governance levels and sectors.³¹³ EAT can arguably be seen as such an actor, working in innovative ways at the intersections of sectors where normal bureaucracies cannot touch. David Nabarro said at one of the EAT Food Forums in Stockholm that he hoped that the EAT network could be working as:

...knitters and weavers creating patterns and mosaics that are in tune with the kind of transformations in life that we believe to be important. We must accept that if we work in a movement, sometimes our style of working will be organic, and

³¹¹ EAT on YouTube, "Dr David Nabarro."

³¹² Guston, "Boundary Organizations in Environmental Policy and Science."

³¹³ Candel, "Food security governance."

uncontrolled, it will not fit nicely into any box. But that is the way in which transformation happens.³¹⁴

From this perspective, EAT can be seen as a disruptive movement of people and initiatives that simply filled a necessary function: to build epistemic and political terrain for a new way of thinking around and working with food. Similar to the role of the Gates Foundation in global health, EAT also had the “star and convening power” to bring decision-makers together to make things happen.³¹⁵ To understand EAT’s role, it might thus be more appropriate to study the policy environment and the specific context in more details. In this light, EAT was not much more than a convener for the various movements underway, and these movements might have influenced EAT just as much as EAT was influencing them.

Contributions and suggestions for further research

The thesis highlights the complexities behind global political relations and the challenges of studying the influence and effectiveness of political initiatives. Non-state actors should not simply be seen as actors standing outside the system exercising influence from there, but rather as a core component of global governance. Case studies like this one are thus appropriate in exploring some of the broader tendencies shaping contemporary global political affairs.

More specifically, this case study offers more empirical knowledge on the origins and nature of EAT and its role in the global policy context of food. In doing so, it simultaneously provides insights to contemporary developments in the broader governance field. Moreover, the case study is a theoretical contribution to research on of the emergence and effectiveness of networks and multi-stakeholder initiatives. More generally, it also contributes to the broader academic debate on the growing influence of non-state actors in the 21st century.

³¹⁴ EAT on YouTube, “Dr David Nabarro,” 17:45-18:09.

³¹⁵ Hinton and Scott, “Where sustainable diets fit in global governance,” 38.

Things are developing rapidly in the fields of food, health, and sustainability. More research could be done to examine the political context discussed in this thesis in more details. A suggestion for further studies could be to investigate the process leading up to the Food Systems Summit more thoroughly, and to map out the various actors involved and the underlying values and motives behind their engagement. Further, more attention should be paid in the future to how the consequences of the Summit plays out in the broader governance field.

A central question in the literature on global health revolves around how commercial interests are increasingly determining political outcomes.³¹⁶ While this study touches upon this topic briefly, it would be interesting to look more closely into the dilemmas of private sector collaboration in political multi-stakeholder initiatives like EAT. In this regard, EAT is a particularly interesting case as it claims to be science-based, maintaining scientific integrity while simultaneously receiving funding from the private sector.

³¹⁶ Maani et al., “The commercial Determinants of Health”, 3.

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Appendix: Informants

	Name and title	Organizational affiliation	Date of interview	Details of interview
1	Anonymous	SUM	December 14, 2020.	Zoom. Recorded.
2	Anonymous	SUM	January 8, 2021.	Zoom. Recorded.
3	Anonymous	SUM	November 4, 2022.	In person. Not recorded.
4	Arne Haugen, Managing Director	EAT	December 20, 2022.	Zoom. Recorded.
5	Usman Mushtaq, Member of Board of Trustees	EAT	January 11, 2023.	Zoom. Recorded.